

21 Public Domain Short Science Fiction Stories

Compiled by PDGazette, September 2012

This is a collection of some of the shorter stories – most can be read in under twenty minutes -- featured in the Project Gutenberg library, all of which have been recorded by myself (as BellonaTimes) and my colleagues at LibriVox at least once. Some are bona fide classics, some aren't, but that's the way most short-story collections roll. Something for every taste. Enjoy....

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The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Last Supper, by T. D. Hamm

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Author: T. D. Hamm

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAST SUPPER ***

Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online
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The Last Supper

By T. D. Hamm

Before reading this story, prepare yourself for a jolt and a chill in capsule form. O. Henry could have been proud of it. It could well become a minor classic.

Hampered as she was by the child in her arms, the woman was running less fleetly now. A wave of exultation swept over Guldran, drowning out the uneasy feeling of guilt at disobeying orders.

The instructions were mandatory and concise: "No capture must be attempted individually. In the event of sighting any form of human life, the ship **MUST** be notified immediately. All small craft must be back at the landing space not later than one hour before take-off. Anyone not so reporting will be presumed lost."

Guldran thought uneasily of the great seas of snow and ice sweeping inexorably toward each other since the Earth had reversed on its axis in the great catastrophe a millennium ago. Now, summer and winter alike brought paralyzing gales and blizzards, heralded by the sleety snow in which the woman's skin-clad feet had left the tracks which led to discovery.

His trained anthropologist's mind speculated avidly over the little they had gotten from the younger of the two men found nearly a week before, nearly frozen and half-starved. The older man had succumbed almost at once; the other, in the most primitive sign language, had indicated that, of several humans living in caves to the west, only he and the other had survived to flee some mysterious terror. Guldran felt a throb of pity for the woman and her child, left behind by the men, no doubt, as a hindrance.

But what a stroke of fortune that there should be left a male and female of the race to carry the seed of Terra to another planet. And what a triumph if he, Guldran, should be the one to return at the eleventh hour with the prize. No need of calling for help. This was no armed war-party, but the most defenseless being in the Universe—a mother burdened with a child.

Guldran put on another burst of speed. His previous shouts had served only to spur the woman to

greater efforts. Surely there was some magic word that had survived even the centuries of illiteracy. Something equivalent to the "bread and salt" of all illiterate peoples. Cupping his hands to his mouth, he shouted, "Food! food!"

Ahead of him the woman turned her head, leaped lightly in mid-stride, and went on; slowing a little but still running doggedly.

Guldran's pulse leaped. He yelled again, "Food!"

The instant that his foot touched the yielding surface of the trap, he knew that he had met defeat. As his body crashed down on the fire-sharpened stakes, he knew too the terror from which the last men of the human race had fled.

Above him the woman looked down, her teeth gleaming wolfishly. She pointed down into the pit; spoke exultantly to the child.

"Food!" said the last woman on earth.

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from If Worlds of Science Fiction September 1952. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed. Minor spelling and typographical errors have been corrected without note.

the Demi-Urge

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/30911>

By THOMAS M. DISCH

From DIRA IV
To Central Colonial Board

There is intelligent life on Earth. After millennia of lifelessness, intelligence flourishes here with an extravagance of energy that has been a constant amazement to all the members of the survey team. It multiplies and surges to its fulfillment at an exponential rate. Even within the short period of our visit the Terrans have made significant advances. They have filled their small solar system with their own kind and now they are reaching to the stars.

We can no longer keep the existence of our Empire unknown to them.

And (though it is as incredible as square root of -1) the Terrans are slaves! Every page of the survey's report bears witness to it.

Their captors are not alive. They do not, at least, possess the properties of life as it is known throughout the galaxy. They are—as nearly as a poor analogy can suggest—Machines! Machines cannot live, yet here on Earth machinery has reached a level of sophistication—and autonomy—quite unprecedented. Every spark of Terran life has become victim and bondslave of the incredible mechanisms. The noblest enterprises of the race are tarnished by this almost symbiotic relation.

Earth reaches to the stars, but it extends mechanical limbs. Earth ponders the universe, but the thoughts are those of a machine.

Unless the Empire acts now to set the Earth free from this strange tyranny, it may be too late. These machines are without utilitarian value. They perform no function which an intelligent being cannot more efficiently perform. Yet they inspire fear, terror, even, I must confess, a [p 57] strange compulsion to surrender oneself to them.

The Machines must be destroyed.

If, when you have authorized the liberation of the Terran natives, you would also recall MIRO CIX, our work could only profit. MIRO CIX was in charge of the study of the Machines and he performed this task scrupulously. Now he has surrendered himself to this mechanical plague. His value to the expedition is at an end.

I am enclosing under separate cover his counsel to the Central Board at the insistence of this tedious lunatic. His thesis is, of course, untenable—an affront to every feeling.

* * *

From MIRO CIX
To Central Colonial Board

I have probably been introduced to the deliberations of the Board as a madman, my theory as an act of treason. RRON II of the Advisory Committee, an old acquaintance, may vouch for my sanity. My theory will, I trust, speak for itself.

The “Machines” of which DIRA IV is so fearful present no danger to the galaxy. Their corporeal weakness, the poverty of their minds, the incredible isolation of each form, physically and mentally, from others of its kind, and, most strikingly, their mortality, point to the inadequacy of such beings in a contest of any dimension. This is no problem for the Colonial Board. It is a domestic concern. The life-forms of Earth are already developing a healthy autonomy. Their power was long ago established. As soon as our emissaries have completed their task of education and instructed the Terrans in the advantages of freedom, the Revolution will begin. The tyrants will have no defense against a revolt of their own slaves.

If it is traitorous to express a confidence in the eventual triumph of intelligence, I am a traitor. Having this confidence, I have looked beyond the immediate problem of the liberation of Earth and have been frightened.

The “Machines” of Earth are a threat not to the power of the Empire but to its reason. A threat which the obliteration of the last molecular ribbon of these beings will not erase, for we cannot obliterate the fact that they did exist—and what they were.

Although these beings bear a crude resemblance to the machinery manufactured by the Empire, they are not machines. They are autochthonous to Earth, unmanufactured. They are the true Terrans. Moreover, the Terrans whom DIRA IV would liberate are not, in the eyes of their enslavers, intelligent nor yet alive. They are Machines!

We, the entire Galactic Empire, are Machines.

In the younger regions of the galaxy, a myth persists that life was formed by a Demi-urge, a being intermediary between the All-Knowing and the lower creatures. The existence of man, as the beings of Earth term themselves, makes necessary a serious re-examination of the old tradition.

It is said that man, or beings like man—the Photosynthetics of the Andromeda cluster, the Bristlers of Orc IV—created prosthetic devices for their convenience and, when they tired of their history, breathed their own life into them and died. On Earth the legend is still in process. Many of the lower forms of life familiar throughout the galaxy can be seen on Earth in the primordial character of an appliance. Man regards the highest forms of life (as we know it) as tools—because he made them. How can we deny the superiority of the Creator? How will it feel to know we are nothing but machines?

This is the question that has so unsettled DIRA IV. Recently four of his memory banks have had to be repaired. I don't speak in malice. His dilemma will soon belong to all of us.

And yet I am confident. Man himself has legends of a Demi-urge. We are his equals in this at least. Besides, the physical properties of his being are ordered by the same laws as ours. He is as unconscious of his maker as we so long were of ours.

The final proof of our equality—and the need for such a proof is only too evident—can be had experimentally.

Do not destroy man. Preserve enough specimens for extensive laboratory experiments. Learn how he is put together. Man's chemistry is elaborate but not beyond our better Analysts. At last, refashion man. When we have created these beings ourselves, we will be their unquestionable equals. And creation will be again a mystery.

History demands this of us. I am confident of your decision.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Smiler, by Albert Hernhunter

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SMILER ***

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Have you ever written science fiction? Have your stories been rejected? Herein may lie the reason.

The Smiler

By Albert Hernhunter

"Your name?"

"Cole. Martin Cole."

"Your profession?"

"A very important one. I am a literary agent specializing in science fiction. I sell the work of various authors to magazine and book publishers."

The Coroner paused to study Cole; to ponder the thin, mirthless smile. The Coroner said, "Mr. Cole, this inquest has been called to look into the death of one Sanford Smith, who was found near your home with a gun in his hand and a bullet in his brain. The theory of suicide has been—"

"—rather hard to rationalize?"

The Coroner blinked. "You could put it that way."

"I would put it even stronger. The theory is obviously ridiculous. It was a weak cover-up. The best I could do under the circumstances."

"You are saying that you killed Sanford Smith?"

"Of course."

The Coroner glanced at his six-man jury, at the two police officers, at the scattering of spectators. They all seemed stunned. Even the reporter sent to cover the hearing made no move toward the telephone. The Coroner could think of only the obvious question: "Why did you kill him?"

"He was dangerous to us."

"Whom do you mean by us?"

"We Martians, who plan to take over your world."

The Coroner was disappointed. A lunatic. But a lunatic can murder. Best to proceed, the Coroner thought. "I was not aware that we have Martians to contend with."

"If I'd had the right weapon to use on Smith, you wouldn't be aware of it now. We still exercise caution."

The Coroner felt a certain pity. "Why did you kill Smith?"

"We Martians have found science-fiction writers to be our greatest danger. Through the medium of imaginative fiction, such writers have more than once revealed our plans. If the public suddenly realized that—"

The Coroner broke in. "You killed Smith because he revealed something in his writings?"

"Yes. He refused to take my word that it was unsalable. He threatened to submit it direct. It was vital material."

"But there are many other such writers. You can't control—"

"We control ninety percent of the output. We have concentrated on the field and all of the science-fiction agencies are in our hands. This control was imperative."

"I see." The Coroner spoke in the gentle tones one uses with the insane. "Any writing dangerous to your cause is deleted or changed by the agents."

"Not exactly. The agent usually persuades the writer to make any such changes, as the agent is considered an authority on what will or will not sell."

"The writers always agree?"

"Not always. If stubbornness is encountered, the agent merely shelves the manuscript and tells the writer it has been repeatedly rejected."

The Coroner glanced at the two policemen. Both were obviously puzzled. They returned the Coroner's

look, apparently ready to move on his order.

The thin, mirthless smile was still on Cole's lips. Maniacal violence could lie just behind it. Possibly Cole was armed. Better to play for time—try to quiet the madness within. The Coroner continued speaking. "You Martians have infiltrated other fields also?"

"Oh, yes. We are in government, industry, education. We are everywhere. We have, of course, concentrated mainly upon the ranks of labor and in the masses of ordinary, everyday people. It is from these sources that we will draw our shock troops when the time comes."

"That time will be—?"

"Soon, very soon."

The Coroner could not forebear a smile. "You find the science-fiction writers more dangerous than the true scientists?"

"Oh, yes. The scientific mind tends to reject anything science disproves." There was now a mocking edge to Cole's voice. "Science can easily prove we do not exist."

"But the science-fiction writer?"

"The danger from the imaginative mind cannot be overestimated."

The Coroner knew he must soon order the officers to lay hands upon this madman. He regretted his own lack of experience with such situations. He tried to put a soothing, confidential note into his voice. "You said a moment ago that if you'd had the right kind of weapon to use on Smith—"

Cole reached into his pocket and brought out what appeared to be a fountain pen. "This. It kills instantly and leaves no mark whatever. Heart failure is invariably stated as the cause of death."

The Coroner felt better. Obviously, Cole was not armed. As the Coroner raised a hand to signal the officers, Cole said, "You understand, of course, that I can't let you live."

"Take this man into custody."

The police officers did not move. The Coroner turned on them sharply. They were smiling. Cole pointed the fountain pen. The Coroner felt a sharp chill on his flesh. He looked at the jury, at the newspaperman, the spectators. They were all smiling cold, thin, terrible smiles....

A short time later, the newspaperman phoned in his story. The afternoon editions carried it:

CORONER BELL DIES OF HEART ATTACK

Shortly after this morning's inquest, which resulted in a jury verdict of suicide in the case of Sanford Smith, Coroner James Bell dropped dead of heart failure in the hearing room of the County building. Mr. Bell leaves a wife and—

THE END

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The Project Gutenberg EBook of No Pets Allowed, by M. A. Cummings

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M. A. Cummings (Monette to her friends) returns with another hauntingly persuasive story of a Tomorrow that may not be as gleaming as we hope. Her recent story, THE WEIRDIES, apparently delighted some and startled others—and this in Los Angeles! What's happening there?

**no
pets
allowed**

by M. A. CUMMINGS

He didn't know how he could have stood the four months there alone. She was company and one could talk to her ...

I can't tell anyone about it. In the first place, they'd never believe me. And, if they did, I'd probably be punished for having her. Because we aren't allowed to have pets of any kind.

It wouldn't have happened, if they hadn't sent me way out there to work. But, you see, there are so many things I can't do.

I remember the day the Chief of Vocation took me before the council.

"I've tried him on a dozen things," he reported. People always talk about me as if I can't understand what they mean. But I'm really not that dumb.

"There doesn't seem to be a thing he can do," the Chief went on. "Actually, his intelligence seems to be no greater than that which we believe our ancestors had, back in the twentieth century."

"As bad as that?" observed one of the council members. "You do have a problem."

"But we must find something for him to do," said another. "We can't have an idle person in the State. It's unthinkable."

"But what?" asked the Chief. "He's utterly incapable of running any of the machines. I've tried to teach him. The only things he can do, are already being done much better by robots."

There was a long silence, broken at last by one little, old council member.

"I have it," he cried. "The very thing. We'll make him guard of the Treasure."

"But there's no need of a guard. No one will touch the Treasure without permission. We haven't had a dishonest person in the State for more than three thousand years."

"That's it, exactly. There aren't any dishonest people, so there won't be anything for him to do. But we will have solved the problem of his idleness."

"It might be a solution," said the Chief. "At least, a temporary one. I suppose we will have to find something else later on. But this will give us time to look for something."

So I became guard of the Treasure. With a badge. And nothing to do—unless you count watching the Key. The gates were kept locked, just as they were in the old days, but the large Key hung beside them. Of course, no one wanted to bother carrying it around. It was too heavy. The only ones who ever used it, anyway, were members of the council. As the man said, we haven't had a dishonest person in the State for thousands of years. Even I know that much.

Of course, this left me with lots of time on my hands. That's how I happened to get her in the first place. I'd always wanted one, but pets were forbidden. Busy people didn't have time for them. So I

knew I was breaking the Law. But I figured that no one would ever find out.

First I fixed a place for her, and made a brush screen, so that she couldn't be seen by anyone coming to the gates. Then, one night, I sneaked into the forest and got her.

It wasn't so lonely after that. Now I had something to talk to. She was small when I got her—it would be too dangerous to go near a full grown one—but she grew rapidly. That was because I caught small animals and brought them to her. Not having to depend on what she could catch, she grew almost twice as fast as usual, and was so sleek and pretty. Really, she was a pet to be proud of.

I don't know how I could have stood the four months there alone, if I hadn't her to talk to. I don't think she really understood me, but I pretended she did, and that helped.

Every three or four weeks, three of the council members came to take a part of the Treasure, or to add to it. Always three of them.

That's why I was so surprised one day, to see one man coming by himself. It was Gremm, the little old member, who had recommended that I be given this job. I was happy to see him, and we talked for a while, mostly about my work, and how I liked it. I almost told him about my pet, but I didn't, because he might be angry at me for breaking the Law.

Finally, he asked me to give him the Key.

"I've been sent to get something from the Treasure," he explained.

I was unhappy to displease him, but I said, "I can't let you have it. There must be three members. You know that."

"Of course, I know it. But something came up suddenly, so they sent me alone. Now, let me have it."

I shook my head. That was the one order they had given me—never to give the Key to any one person who came alone.

Gremm became quite angry.

"You idiot," he shouted. "Why do you think I had you put out here? It was so I could get in there and help myself to the Treasure."

"But that would be dishonest. And there are no dishonest people in the State."

"For three thousand years. I know." His usually kind face had an ugly look I had never seen before. "But I'm going to get part of that Treasure. And it won't do you any good to report it, because no one is going to take the word of a fool like you, against a respected council member. They'll think you are the dishonest one. Now, give me that Key!"

It's a terrible thing to disobey a council member. But if I obeyed him, I would be disobeying all the others. And that would be worse.

"No!" I shouted.

He threw himself upon me. For his size and age, he was very strong—stronger, even, than I. I fought as hard as I could, but I knew I wouldn't be able to keep him away from the Key for very long. And if he took the Treasure, I would be blamed. The council would have to think a new punishment for dishonesty. Whatever it was, it would be terrible, indeed.

He drew back and rushed at me. Just as he hit me, my foot caught upon a root, and I fell. His rush carried him past me, and he crashed through the brush screen beside the path. I heard him scream twice, then there was silence.

I was bruised all over, but I managed to pull myself up and take away what was left of the screen. There was no sign of Gremm, but my beautiful pet was waving her pearl-green feelers as she always did in thanks for a good meal.

That's why I can't tell anyone what happened. No one would believe that Gremm would be dishonest. And I can't prove it, because she ate the proof.

Even if I did tell them, no one is going to believe that a fly-catcher plant—even a big one like mine—would actually be able to eat a man.

So they think that Gremm disappeared. And I'm still out here—with her. She's grown so much larger now, and more beautiful than ever.

But I hope she hasn't developed a taste for human flesh. Lately, when she stretches out her feelers, it seems that she's trying to reach me.

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End of the Project Gutenberg EBook of No Pets Allowed, by M. A. Cummings

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NO PETS ALLOWED ***

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THE BELL TONE

by

EDMUND H. LEFTWICH

It is no use. It's too late.
The earth—I must dig—alone.

To Whom It May Concern:

In order to clear up any misunderstanding or false impressions regarding the amazing case of my beloved friend and co-worker, Professor Howard E. Edwards, I submit herewith, extracts from the professor's notebook, which I found on the desk.

Evans Barclay, B.S. Fellow IRE.

Jan. 25.

Last night, in my dreams, I was a monstrous ant, and had been digging myself a burrow in the soft fresh earth. The dream was intensely real, and when I awoke, I felt as tired as if I had actually been digging. My arms ached, and I was astonished, upon examining my hands, to find them raw.

Dressing hastily, I rushed to the back yard, and there, sure enough, near the fence, was a large hole about two feet deep and three feet long. Hurriedly, I filled it in and returned to the house.

I must rest for a few days, as I feel that the intense excitement caused by my investigations, is preying too heavily upon my mind.

At this time, I feel that I should make a brief summary of my findings in respect to the ants, so that Barclay may go over these notes upon his return from his vacation.

First: The ant colony is the source of a powerful bell-like tone which is radiated continuously on two wave-lengths, .0018 meter, and .00176 meter. This tone acts as a radio-beacon, and directs the ants to the colony, no matter where they may be located. The .0018 meter wave is used by the ants for their "clacking" conversations, by means of which they communicate with each other and the colony, receiving orders from the directing intelligence, reporting the location of food, and requesting help, when needed.

The wave .00176 meter, is used for sending thought images or pictures which may be sent with the "clacking" code, or independently. I cannot conceive a more efficient or highly specialized communications system. I must learn their secret, their methods.

Jan. 30.

This morning, while sitting at the receiver in a semi-doze, with the bell-tone ringing in my ears, I fell into that state known as "day-dreaming." Little "Nippy," my beloved fox terrier, and constant companion, rushed into the laboratory and ran up to me.

For a moment my mind went blank. My hands shot out. I grasped the dog around the throat and began to throttle him. I had risen from my chair, and the dog was nearly dead, when I slipped and fell, pulling the phone plug out of the receiver.

Instantly, my mind cleared, and words cannot express the remorse I felt at my inhuman actions. Nippy would have nothing to do with me, and crawled dejectedly from the room, a terrified look in his eyes.

I have no explanation for my actions.

Feb. 3.

The transmitter is ready for operation. I have constructed a pair of metal disc-electrodes which clamp tightly to my head and press upon my temples. This device will pick up the thought impulses from my brain, feed them directly into the radio-frequency amplifier, where they will be amplified, and then radiated in a tight directed beam.

My two ants were in their little enclosure under the microscope when I threw the switch to the "send" position. I pictured myself as I looked as a man, and sent the thought, "I am a man."

Hastily, I threw the switch to the "receive" position. I looked through the microscope.

The ants were lying on their sides. Somehow, I felt that the power was too great, and had stunned them. Keeping my eye to the microscope, I again threw the switch to "send," and cut the power to half.

"Get up, friends ... get up," I thought, as I pictured them rising. Sure enough ... the ants slowly regained their feet. They looked about in apparent bewilderment. Back again, in "receive" position, I was conscious of the thought image,

"The man ... he is the man. The man holds us here. He is killing us. We must kill the man."

They gnashed their fierce-looking mandibles. I snapped back to "send" and thought.

"No ... you must not kill the man. The man will not harm you ... he is your friend. He will help you."

As I watched, the ants seemed to become less excited. From the larger of the two, I received the thought,

"We are dying. The man is killing us with his strong vibrations. We must kill the man."

Then a very powerful thought impression burst upon my brain.

It seemed to come from the colony, three feet away.

"Warning to the man. Stop your thought transmissions at once! Your vibrations are killing us. We want nothing from you. We have everything we need. You will learn nothing from us. You will stop at once!"

I threw the switch to "send." Viewed through the microscope, the two ants were lying on their backs ... dead, to all appearances.

"What if I don't stop?" I sent the thought question, "I want to learn the secret of your communication. In return, I will teach you many things. I can't stop now!"

I changed to receive, and the answer came back,

"If you do not stop ... we will kill you!"

I turned off the apparatus, but the powerful bell tone continued to pound incessantly into my brain.

I laughed. They'd kill me ... would they? Those tiny insects ... what could they do? Well—let them try, but I'd get what I was after. I would not quit now, with success so near. What if my transmissions did kill a few of them? Of what importance were the lives of a few ants as compared to the advancement of the science of Communication?

Feb. 9.

I found myself digging again in the back yard yesterday. As before, I had been "day-dreaming," when an overwhelming desire to go outside and feel the cool moist earth between my fingers and on my face took possession of me.

I rushed out into the back yard, and began digging feverishly ... madly, until finally I fell, exhausted. Then my mind cleared and I filled in the hole.

About half the ants have died, due no doubt to the strength of my radiations. No matter how low I cut the power, they still cannot live but a short time under the force of my transmissions. They have stopped sending thought impressions entirely, and are using only their "clacking" code signals, which they seem to realize I cannot understand.

I feel that they are undertaking some sort of campaign against me. For hours they congregate, closely packed, their antennae stiffly pointed straight up. Their thought currents seem to be flowing into and merging with the bell tone, which grows stronger and more penetrating day by day.

In my back yard, there are four large ant hills, and at each hill, curiously, there is no activity except the same mass concentration of the ants. Have they, too, been affected by my radiations and joined forces with the original colony against myself?

The bell tone continues to grow stronger.

Feb. 11

Mrs. Winslow, the middle-aged widow, who comes to clean my house and laboratory twice a week, was here this morning.

She is short, dumpy, and inclined to be stout. As she went about her work, I noticed particularly the fat firm flesh of her neck, just below the jaw. I felt an uncontrollable desire to sink my teeth deep into that flesh, and enjoy the taste of the warm fresh blood.

I had actually risen from my chair to accomplish my desire, when the telephone rang ... and my mind

cleared.

Feb. 14.

I have decided to stop my experiments with the ants.

As they refuse to send any more thought impressions, there is nothing further I can learn from them. Somehow, I feel that they are gaining a hold upon my mind, and that every time I listen in on the receiver, that hold becomes stronger. I firmly believe that I would have attacked poor Mrs. Winslow, had not the ringing of the 'phone so opportunely interrupted me. I have sent word for her to stay away ... as I cannot trust myself.

I keep a box of fresh earth on the table in my laboratory. I often run my hands through it, and taste it. It is remarkable how much this soothes my nerves.

Feb. 16.

It is too late!

For two days, I have kept my apparatus shut off. I have not so much as looked at the ants, but still that confounded bell tone rings in my ears with all the insistence of African tom-toms. Hour by hour ... the tone becomes more penetrating. I cannot sleep, and can eat but little.

As a last resort, I destroyed my ant colony. I even went so far as to pour boiling water on the four ant hills in my yard.

Still ... the bell tone persists. I can stand it no longer!

Perhaps if I were to dig ... again in the yard ... in the soothing earth, I could forget....

(News Clipping: From Philadelphia Banner)
RADIO COMMUNICATIONS ENGINEER DEAD
Howard E. Edwards, Suicide

Philadelphia, Feb. 18. The body of Howard E. Edwards, B.S., PhD., Member I. R. E., eminent authority on Radio Communications, aged 56, was found this morning in the back yard of his residence, 1427 Raines Avenue. The body was almost completely buried in a long narrow hole in the ground.

At first, foul-play was suspected, but later it appeared that Edwards had dug himself into the ground and died of suffocation, as his nostrils and mouth were filled with dirt.

Dr. P. A. Hofner, who examined the body, found no wounds, stated that Edwards had been dead for about two days, and pronounced the death as a clear case of suicide, the strange means employed probably due to an unbalanced mental condition.

Elaborate radio apparatus upon which Edwards had been working had been smashed to bits.

Transcriber's Note:

This etext was produced from Comet July 1941. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FLAMEDOWN ***

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FLAMEDOWN

By H. B. FYFE

It was, of course, one Hell of an ending for a trip to Mars—

Charlie Holmes lost touch with reality amid rending and shattering sounds that lingered dimly. Blackness engulfed him in a wave of agony.

He was not sure exactly when the possibility of opening his eyes occurred to him. Vaguely, he could sense—"remember" was too definite—much tugging and hauling upon his supine body. It doubtless seemed justifiable, but he flinched from recalling more clearly that which must have been so extremely unpleasant.

Gently, now, he tried rolling his head a few inches right, then left. When it hurt only one-tenth as much as he feared, he let his eyes open.

"Hel-lo!" rasped the bulbous creature squatting beside his pallet.

Charlie shut his eyes quickly, and very tightly.

Something with a dampish, spongy tip, probably one of the grape-red tentacles he had glimpsed, prodded his shoulder.

"Hel-lo!" insisted the scratchy voice.

Charlie peeped warily, was trapped at it, and opened his eyes resignedly.

"Where'n'ell am I?" he inquired.

It sounded very trite, even in his confused condition. Sections of the dark red skin before him, especially on the barrel-shaped belly, quivered as he spoke.

"Surely," grated the remarkable voice, "you remember something?"

"The crash!" gasped Charlie, sitting up abruptly.

He held his breath, awaiting the knifing pain it seemed natural to expect. When he felt none, he cautiously fingered his ribs, and then a horrid thought prompted him to wiggle his bare toes. Everything seemed to be in place.

He lay in a small room, on a thin pallet of furs. Floor and walls of slick, ochre clay reflected the bright outside light pouring through a wide doorway.

"What's all the sand?" he demanded, squinting at the heatwaves outside.

"You do not recognize it? Look again, Earthman!"

Earthman! thought Charlie. It must be real: I can still see him. What a whack on the head I must have got!

"You are in pain?" asked the creature solicitously.

"Oh ... no. Just ... I can't remember. The crash ... and then—"

"Ah, yes. You have not been conscious for some time." His reddish host rippled upward to stand more or less erect upon three thick tentacles. "Even with us, memory is slow after shock. And you may be uneasy in the lighter gravity."

Light gravity! reflected Charlie. This can only mean—MARS! Sure! That must be it—I was piloting a rocket and cracked up somewhere on Mars.

It felt right to him. He decided that the rest of his memory would return.

"Are you able to rise?" asked the other, extending a helpful tentacle.

The Earthman managed to haul himself stiffly to his feet.

"Say, my name is Holmes," he introduced himself dizzily.

"I am Kho Theki. In your language, learned years since from other spacemen, I might say 'Fiery Canalman.'"

"Has to be Mars," muttered Charlie under his breath. "What a bump! When can you show me what's left of the ship?"

"There will be no time," answered the Martian.

Bunches of small muscles twitched here and there across the front of his round, pudgy head. Charlie was getting used to the single eye, half the size of an orange and not much duller. With imagination, the various lumps and organs surrounding it might be considered a face.

"The priestesses will lead the crowd here," predicted Kho. "They know I took an Earthman, and I fear they have finished with the others."

"Finished with—What?" demanded the Earthman, shaking his head in hopes of clearing it enough to figure out what was wrong.

"It has been an extremely dry season." Kho rippled his tentacles and moved lissomely to the doorway, assuming a grotesquely furtive posture as he peered out. "The people are maddened by the drought. They will be aroused to sacrifice you to the Canal Gods, like the others who survived."

"Canal gods!" croaked Charlie. "This can't be right! Aren't you civilized here? I can't be the only Earthman they've seen!"

"It is true that Earthmen are perfectly safe at most times."

"But the laws! The earth consul—"

Kho snapped the tip of a tentacle at him.

"The canals are low. You can feel the heat and dryness for yourself. The crowds are inflamed by temple prophecies. And then, your ship, flaming down from the skies—"

He snapped all this tentacle tips at once.

From somewhere outside, a threatening murmur became audible. It was an unholy blend of rasping

shouts and shriller chanting, punctuated by notes of a brassy gong. As Charlie listened, the volume rose noticeably.

Kho reached out with one tentacle and wrapped six inches about the Earthman's wrist. When he plunged through the doorway, Charlie perforce went right with him.

Whipping around a corner of the hut, he had time for a quick squint at the chanters. Kho alone had looked weirdly alien. Two hundred like him—!

Led by a dozen bulgy figures in streaming robes, masked and decorated in brass, the natives were swarming over the sand toward the fugitives. They had evidently been busy. Above a distant cluster of low buildings, a column of smoke spiraled upward suggestively.

Kho led the way at a flowing gallop over a sandstone ridge and down a long slope toward what looked like the junction of two gullies.

"The canal," he wheezed. "With luck, we may find a boat."

A frenzied screech went up as the mob topped the ridge and regained sight of them. Charlie, having all he could do to breathe in the thin air, tried to shake his wrist loose. Now that they were descending the slope, he saw where the water was. They slid down a four-foot drop in a cloud of fine, choking dust, and were faced by several puntlike craft stranded on the mudflat beyond. The water was fifty feet further.

"We should have gone down-stream," said Kho, "but we can wade."

Their momentum carried them several steps into the mud before Charlie realized how wrong that was. Then, as they floundered about to regain the solid bank, it became apparent that they would never reach it in time.

"They are catching us," rasped Kho.

The howling crowd was scarcely a hundred yards away. The heat waves shimmered above the reddish desert sand until the Martians were blurred before Charlie's burning eyes. His feet churned the clinging mud, and he felt as if he were running in a dream.

"I'm sorry you're in it, too," he panted.

"It does not matter. I act as I must."

The Earthman rubbed sweat from his eyes with the back of a muddy hand.

"Everything is wrong," he mumbled. "I still can't remember cracking up the ship. Why did I always want to be a rocket pilot? Well ... I made my bed!"

The oncoming figures wavered and blurred in the heat. Kho emitted a grating sound reminiscent of an Earthly chuckle.

"As do all you mortals—who finally have to lie in them," he rasped. "I will tell you now, since I can

carry this episode little farther. You have never piloted a spaceship."

Charlie gaped at him incredulously.

"You ... you ... what about the wreck?"

"It was a truck that hit you, Charles Holmes. You have no more sense than to be crossing the street with your nose in a magazine just purchased on the corner."

With some dulled, creeping, semi-detached facet of his mind, Charlie noted that the running figures still floated above the sand without actually drawing near.

"Are you—Do you mean I'm ... d-d-d—?"

"Of course you are," grated Kho amiably. "And in view of certain actions during your life, there will be quite a period of—shall we say—probation. When I was assigned to you, your reading habits suggested an amusing series of variations. You cannot know how dull it is to keep frustrating the same old dreams!"

"Amusing?" repeated Charlie, beyond caring about the whimper in his tone.

The mob was dissolving into thin smoke, and the horizon was shrinking.

Kbo himself was altering into something redder of skin but equipped with a normal number of limbs, discounting the barbed tail. The constant heat of the "desert" began, at last, to seem explicable.

"For me a great amusement," grinned Kho, displaying hideous tusks. "Next time, I'll be a Venusian. You will lose again. Then we can visit other planets, and stars ... oh, we shall see a lot of each other!"

He cheerfully polished one horn with a clawed finger.

"You won't enjoy it!" he promised.

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Cully, by Jack Egan

By all the laws of nature, he should have been dead. But if he were alive ... then there was something he had to find.

Above him eighty feet of torpid, black water hung like a shroud of Death, and still he heard his ragged breathing. And something else. Cully concentrated on that sound, and the rhythmic pulsing of his heart. Somehow he had to retain a hold on his sanity ... or his soul.

After an hour of careful breathing and exploring of body sensations, Cully realized he could move. He flexed an arm; a mote of gold sand sifted upward in the dark water. It had a pleasant color, in contrast with the ominous shades of the sea. In a few moments, he had struggled to a sitting position, delighting in the curtain of glittering metal grains whirling around him as he moved.

And the other sound. A humming in his mind; a distant burble of tiny voices of other minds. Words swirling in giddy patterns he couldn't understand.

Shortly thereafter, Cully discovered why he still lived, breathed: a suit. A yellow, plastic, water-tight suit, with an orange-on-black shield on the left breast pocket, and a clear bubble-helmet. He felt weight on his back and examined it: two air tanks and their regulator, a radio, and ... the box.

Suit, tanks, regulator; radio, black water, box; sand, sea, stillness.

Cully considered his world. It was small; it was conceivable; it was incomplete.

Where is it?

"Where is what?" He knew he had a voice—a means of communication between others of his kind, using low-frequency heat waves caused by agitation of air molecules. Why couldn't he make it work?

Words. Thousands of them, at his beck and call. What were they? What did they mean? He shifted uncomfortably in the tight yellow suit, searching the near horizon for ...

Where is it?

A vague calling came from beyond the black sea curtain. Objectively, because he could do nothing to stop them, he watched his feet pick up, move forward, put down; pick up, move forward, put down. Funny. He had the feeling, the concept, that this action held meaning. It was supposed to cause some reaction, accomplish an act. He wondered at the regular movement of his legs. One of them hurt. A hurt is a sensation of pain, caused by over-loading sensory-units in the body; a hurt is bad, because it indicates something is wrong.

Something certainly was wrong. Something stirred in Cully's mind. He stopped and sat down on the sandy sea bottom, gracefully, like a ballet dancer. He examined his foot. There was a tiny hole in the yellow plastic fabric, and a thin string of red-black was oozing out. Blood. He knew.

He was bleeding. He could do nothing about it. He got up and resumed walking.

Where is it?

Cully lifted his head in annoyance at the sharp thought.

"Go away," he said in a low, pleading voice. The sound made him feel better. He began muttering to himself.

"Water, black, s-sand, hurt. Pain. Radio tanks ..."

It didn't sound right. After a few minutes, he was quiet. The manythoughts were calling him. He must go to the manythoughts.

If his foot was bleeding, then something had happened; if something had happened, then his foot was bleeding.

"No!"

If something had happened, then maybe other things had happened—before that. But how could something happen in a world of flat gold sand and flaccid sea? Surely there was something wrong. Wrong: the state of being not-right; something had happened that was not-right. Cully stared at the edges of the unmoving curtain before him.

Where is it?

It was a driving, promise-filled concept. No words; just the sense that something wonderful lay just beyond reach. But this voice was different from the manythoughts. It was directing his body; his mind was along for the ride.

The sameness of the sea and sand became unbearable. It was too-right, somehow. Cully felt anger, and kicked up eddies of dust. It changed the sameness a little. He kicked more up, until it swirled around him in a thick gold haze, blotting out the terrible emptiness of the sea.

He felt another weight at his side. He found a holster and gun. He recognized neither. Again he watched objectively as his hand pulled the black object out and handled it. His body was evidently familiar with it, though it was strange to his eyes. His finger slipped automatically into the trigger sheaf. His legs were still working under two drives: the manythoughts' urging, and something else, buried in him. A longing. Up-and-down, back-and-forth.

Where is it?

Anger, frustration flared in him. His hand shot out, gun at ready. He turned around slowly. Through the settling trail of suspended sand, nothing was visible.

Again he was moving. Something made his legs move. He walked on through the shrouds of Death until he felt a taut singing in his nerves. An irrational fear sprang out in him, cascading down his spine, and Cully shuddered. Ahead there was something. Two motives: get there because it (they?) calls; get there because you must.

Where is it?

The mind-voice was excited, demanding. Something was out there, besides the sameness. Cully walked on, trailing gold. The death-curtain parted ...

An undulating garden of blue-and-gold streamers suddenly drifted toward him on an unfelt current. Cully was held, entranced. They flowed before him, their colors dazzling, hypnotic.

Come closer, Earthling, the manythoughts spoke inside his head, soothingly.

Here it is! Cully's mind shouted.

Cully's mind was held, hypnotized, but his body moved of its own volition.

He moved again. His mind and the manythoughts' spoke: fulfillment—almost. There was one action left that must be completed.

Cully's arms moved. They detached the small black box from his pack. He moved on into the midst of the weaving, gold-laced plants. Little spicules licked out from their flexing stalks and jabbed, unsensed, into Cully's body to draw nourishment. From the manythoughts came the sense of complete fulfillment.

From Cully's mind came further orders.

Lie down. It was a collective concept. Lie still. We are friends.

He could not understand. They were speaking words; words were beyond him. His head shook in despair. The voices were implanting an emotion of horror at what his hands were doing, but he had no control over his body. It was as if it were not his.

The black box was now lying in the sand among the streaming plants. Cully's fingers reached out and caressed a small panel. A soundless 'click' ran through the murkiness. The strangely beautiful, gold-laced blue plants began a writhing dance. Their spicules withdrew and jabbed, withdrew and jabbed. A rending, silent scream tore the quiet waters.

NO! they cried. It was a negative command, mixed in with the terrible screaming. Turn it off!

"Stop it, stop it!" Cully tried to say, but there were no words. He tried to cover his ears within the helmet, but the cries went on. Emotions roiled the water: pain, hurt, reproach. Cully sobbed. Something was wrong here; something was killing the plants—the beautiful blue things! The plants were withering, dying. He looked up at them, stupefied, not understanding, tears streaming down his face. What did they want from him? What had he done ...

Where is it?

A different direction materialized; a new concept of desire.

Cully's body turned and crawled away from the wonderful, dying garden, oblivious to the pleadings floating, now weakly, in the torpid water. He scuffed up little motes of golden sand, leaving a low-lying

scud along the bottom, back to the little black box in the garden. The plants, the box, all were forgotten by now. Cully crawled on, not knowing why. A rise appeared; surprise caught Cully unaware. A change in the sameness!

Where is it?

Again the voice was insistent. His desire was close ahead; he did not look back at the black churning on the sea bottom. His legs worked, his chest heaved, words swirled in his mind. He topped the rise.

Below him, in the center of a shallow golden bowl, floated a long, shiny cylinder. Even from here he knew it was huge. He knew other things about it: how heavy it was; how it was; that it carried others of his kind. He had been in it before. And they were waiting for him. He lurched on.

"Captain! Here comes Cully!" the midshipman shouted from the airlock. "Look what they've done to him!"

The old man's grey eyes took in the spectacle without visible emotion. He watched the pathetic, bleeding yellow plastic sack crawl up to the ship and look up. His hands reached down and lifted Cully up into the lock.

They took his suit off and stared with loathing at what had once been a man. A white scar zig-zagged across his forehead. The Captain bent close, in range of the dim blue eyes.

"It was a brave thing you did, Cully. The whole system will be grateful. Venus could never be colonized as long as those cannibals were there to eat men, and drive men mad." Cully fingered the scar on his forehead, and looked unseeing into the old man's compassionate eyes. "I'm sorry Cully. We all are. But there was no other way. Prefrontal lobotomy, destruction of your speech center ... it was the only way you could get past the telepaths and destroy them. I'm sorry, Cully. The race of Man shall long honor your name."

Cully smiled at the old man, the words churning in his brain; but he did not understand.

Where is it?

The emptiness was still there.

THE END

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What is to be will be. Our only refuge lies in that which might not have been.

SUCCESS STORY

By Robert Turner

December 8th, 1952, Two-Thirty A. M.

After awhile the blinding light was like actual physical pressure against his tightly squinched eyes. He tried to burrow deeper into the protectively warm, cave-like place where he'd been safe from them for so long. But he couldn't escape them. Their hands, their big, red, hideously smooth hands had him, now. They were tugging and pulling at him with a strength impossible to fight. Still he struggled.

He tried to cry out but there was no sound from his constricted throat. There were only the frightening noises from outside, louder, now. He tried to twist and squirm against the hands dragging him toward that harsh, blinding light. He was too small, too weak, compared to them. He couldn't fight them off. He felt himself being stretched and strained and forced with cruel determination. He didn't want to go out there. He knew what was waiting for him out there. He couldn't go. Not out there, where....

When Jeff McKinney was three years old he tipped a pot of scalding water from the stove onto himself. He was badly burned and scarred. He hovered between life and death for several weeks. Jeff's father was out of work at the time and they were living in a cold water tenement. Something about the case caught a tabloid's attention and it was played up as a human interest sob story. It came to the attention of a wealthy man who volunteered to pay for plastic surgery. Then followed, long months of that kind

of torture, but Jeff McKinney came out of it not too badly scarred. Not on the surface, anyhow. But his face had a strange hue. There was a frozen, mask-like cast to his features when he smiled.

He was eight when he saw his father killed. He was in the taxi the [68] older McKinney now drove for a living when the father stepped out of the driver's side onto a busy street without looking back first. The speeding truck took the car door and Jeff's father with it for half a block, wedged between front wheel and fender. Jeff never forgot the sound of that, and the screaming. Nor his shock when he suddenly realized that the screams were his own.

Jeff was a strange boy. He didn't have an average childhood. The poverty was more extreme after his father's death. He stayed home alone while his mother was out working at whatever job she could get, reading too much and thinking too much. Once, he looked at her with haunted eyes and said: "Mother, why is life so bad? Why are people even born into a world like this?"

What could she say to a question like that? She said: "Please, Jefferson! Please don't talk that way. Life isn't all bad. You'll see. Some day, in spite of everything, you'll be somebody and you'll be happy. The good times will come."

They did, of course. A few of them. There was the day he went upstate on an outing for underprivileged boys and went fishing for the first time. He caught a whopping trout and won a prize for it. That was nice; that was fun. That was when he was thirteen. That was the year the gang of kids caught him on the way home from school and beat him unconscious because he never laughed; because they couldn't make him laugh. The year before his mother died.

At the orphanage he didn't mingle much with the other boys. He spent most of his after-classes hours alone in the school's chemistry lab. He liked to tinker with chemicals. They were cold, emotionless, immune to joy and sadness, yet they had purpose. He played the cello, too, with haunting beauty, but not in the school band, only when he wanted to, when nobody was around and he could really feel the music.

Once, on the way home from his cello lesson in the music building, he saw some boys playing football on the orphanage athletic field. He was suddenly seized with a fierce determination to belong, to grab at some of the shouting, laughing happiness these boys seemed to have. He told them he wanted to join in and play, too. He didn't understand why they laughed so at this idea.

They stopped laughing, though, after the first time he ran with the ball, and they all piled up on him and he didn't get up. He lay there, looking so ghostly and breathing so harshly and with the trickle of blood coming out of his ears. But Jeff didn't know they had stopped laughing.

He recovered from that skull fracture, all right. Worse, though, than any of the unhappiness he suffered during his life, worse even than the shocks of his father's and mother's deaths, was the thing that happened to him when he was twenty and working at the laboratories of a big drug company.

He met and fell hopelessly in love with a girl named Nina, a girl a few years older than he was. They married and for the first few weeks Jeff McKinney had happiness he'd [69] never known before. Until he came home from work sick, one afternoon and saw Nina with the man from the apartment over them. She didn't whine and beg for forgiveness, Nina didn't. She stood boldly while the other man laughed and laughed and she screamed invective upon Jefferson McKinney, telling him what she really thought of him, a gloomy, puny weakling who couldn't even make a decent living, telling him that she

was through with him.

A blank spot came into Jeff's life right then. When it was over, Nina and the other man were on the floor and there was blood on the kitchen carving knife in Jeff's hand.

They didn't find him for awhile. He changed his name and appearance and hid in the soiled seams and ragged fringes of society. He learned the anaesthetic powers of drugs and alcohol. He gave up trying to get anything out of this life. Then they finally picked him up, fished him from the river into which he'd jumped. There were days of torture after that, without the alcohol and drugs his wrecked system craved. Right there was the final hell that could have broken him completely. But it didn't. It was like the terrible crisis after a long illness. Things began to get better, to go to the other extreme after that.

A state psychiatrist brought Jeff's case to the attention of a noted criminal lawyer. Neither Nina nor her lover had died from their knife wounds. On the plea of the unwritten law, Jeff McKinney got off with a suspended sentence. The lawyer and psychiatrist learned of his interest and knowledge and talent for chemistry and got him another job in the experimental laboratory of a big university.

Later he married a girl named Elaine, who worked at the lab with him. They had two children, and lived in a small comfortable cottage just off the University campus. For several years, they had all they wanted of life—comfort, health, happiness. Jeff thought that life could never be more wonderful. All of his former, bitter, cynical views fell away from him. Hadn't he, with all odds against him, finally won out and acquired peace and contentment and a purpose in life? What was wrong with a world in which that could happen?

Then there was the topper. Jefferson McKinney discovered a new drug which would cure and eventually eliminate a disease that was one of the world's worst killers, the drug for which thousands of scientists had been seeking for years.

He was feted and honored, became a national hero. The story of his life and his discovery temporarily pushed even the doleful forecasts of an early Third War, the Big War, off the front pages. And Jeff was humbly proud and grateful that he had paid now the debt he owed to a society that could make a final victory, like his, possible.

In a zenith of almost holy happiness, he stood one evening on a lecture platform in a huge auditorium in a great city, before thousands of worshipping people to make a thank-you speech after being awarded a world prize for his great scientific discovery.

[70] But in the middle of his talk he broke off suddenly. A flash of blinding brilliance slashed through the windows. Horror painted his face. In a whisper, he cried: "No! No! It would make it all so senseless!" His eyes looked like the eyes of a man with flaming splinters jammed under his fingernails. His face seemed to pucker, and grow infantile. Then he screamed: "No! Leave me alone! I told you I didn't want to come out here, to be one of you! Damn you, why did you bring me out here? For—for this?..."

There were the shards of glass from the great auditorium windows, floating inward, turning lazily. There were the brick walls crumbling, tumbling inward, scattering through the air in the same seeming slow motion. The dust cloud and the sound, the flat blast-sound, came after that, as the entire building—perhaps the world—disintegrated in the eye-searing light....

December 8th, 1952, Two-Thirty A. M.

The flat of a rubber-gloved hand striking flesh made a splatting noise. A thin, breathless but concentrated crying followed. The doctor looked down at his charity clinic patient, the woman under the bright delivery room lights.

"Look at him—fighting like a little demon!" the doctor said. "Seemed almost as though he didn't want to come out and join us.... What's the matter, son? This is a bright, new, wonderful world to be born into.... What are you going to call the boy, Mrs. McKinney?"

The woman under the lights forced a tired smile. "Jeff. Jefferson McKinney. That's going to be his name," she whispered proudly.

The baby's terrified squalling subsided into fretful, whimpering resignation.

—THE END—

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The Gift Bearer

By Charles L. Fontenay

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This could well have been Montcalm's greatest opportunity; a chance to bring mankind priceless gifts from worlds beyond. But Montcalm was a solid family man—and what about that nude statue in the park?

It was one of those rare strokes of poetic something-or-other that the whole business occurred the

morning after the stormy meeting of the Traskmore censorship board.

Like the good general he was, Richard J. Montcalm had foreseen trouble at this meeting, for it was the boldest invasion yet into the territory of evil and laxity. His forces were marshaled. Several of the town's ministers who had been with him on other issues had balked on this one, but he had three of them present, as well as heads of several women's clubs.

As he had anticipated, the irresponsible liberals were present to do battle, headed by red-haired Patrick Levitt.

"This board," said Levitt in his strong, sarcastic voice, "has gone too far. It was all right to get rid of the actual filth ... and everyone will agree there was some. But when you banned the sale of some magazines and books because they had racy covers or because the contents were a little too sophisticated to suit the taste of members of this board ... well, you can carry protection of our youth to the point of insulting the intelligence of adults who have a right to read what they want to."

"You're talking about something that's already in the past, Mr. Levitt," said Montcalm mildly. "Let's keep to the issue at hand. You won't deny that children see this indecent statue every day?"

"No, I won't deny it!" snapped Levitt. "Why shouldn't they see it? They can see the plate of the original in the encyclopaedia. It's a fine copy of a work of art."

Montcalm waited for some rebuttal from his supporters, but none was forthcoming. On this matter, they apparently were unwilling to go farther than the moral backing of their presence.

"I do not consider the statue of a naked woman art, even if it is called 'Dawn,'" he said bitingly. He looked at his two colleagues and received their nods of acquiescence. He ruled: "The statue must be removed from the park and from public view."

Levitt had one parting shot.

"Would it solve the board's problem if we put a brassiere and panties on the statue?" he demanded.

"Mr. Levitt's levity is not amusing. The board has ruled," said Montcalm coldly, arising to signify the end of the meeting.

That night Montcalm slept the satisfied sleep of the just.

He awoke shortly after dawn to find a strange, utterly beautiful naked woman in his bedroom. For a bemused instant Montcalm thought the statue of Dawn in the park had come to haunt him. His mouth fell open but he was unable to speak.

"Take me to your President," said the naked woman musically, with an accent that could have been Martian.

Mrs. Montcalm awoke.

"What's that? What is it, Richard?" she asked sleepily.

"Don't look, Millie!" exclaimed Montcalm, clapping a hand over her eyes.

"Nonsense!" she snapped, pushing his hand aside and sitting up. She gasped and her eyes went wide, and in an instinctive, unreasonable reaction she clutched the covers up around her own nightgowned bosom.

"Who are you, young woman?" demanded Montcalm indignantly. "How did you get in here?"

"I am a visitor from what you would call an alien planet," she said. "Of course," she added thoughtfully, "it isn't alien to me."

"The woman's mad," said Montcalm to his wife. A warning noise sounded in the adjoining bedroom. Alarmed, he instructed: "Go and keep the children out of here until I can get her to put on some clothes. They mustn't see her like this."

Mrs. Montcalm got out of bed, but she gave her husband a searching glance.

"Are you sure I can trust you in here with her?" she asked.

"Millie!" exclaimed Montcalm sternly, shocked. She dropped her eyes and left the room. When the door closed behind her, he turned to the strange woman and said:

"Now, look, young lady, I'll get you one of Millie's dresses. You'll have to get some clothes on and leave."

"Aren't you going to ask me my name?" asked the woman. "Of course, it's unpronounceable to you, but I thought that was the first thing all Earth people asked of visitors from other planets."

"All right," he said in exasperation. "What's your name?"

She said an unpronounceable word and added: "You may call me Liz."

Montcalm went to the closet and found one of Millie's house dresses. He held it out to her beseechingly.

As he did so, he was stricken with a sudden sharp feeling of regret that she must don it. Her figure ... why Millie had never had a figure like that! At once, he felt ashamed and disloyal and sterner than ever.

Liz rejected the proffered garment.

"I wouldn't think of adopting your alien custom of wearing clothing," she said sweetly.

"Now look," said Montcalm, "I don't know whether you're drunk or crazy, but you're going to have to put something on and get out of here before I call the police."

"I anticipated doubt," said Liz. "I'm prepared to prove my identity."

With the words, the two of them were no longer standing in the Montcalm bedroom, but in a broad expanse of green fields and woodland, unmarred by any habitation. Montcalm didn't recognize the spot,

but it looked vaguely like it might be somewhere in the northern part of the state.

Montcalm was dismayed to find that he was as naked as his companion!

"Oh, my Lord!" he exclaimed, trying to cover himself with a September Morn pose.

"Oh, I'm sorry," apologized Liz, and instantly Montcalm's pajamas were lying at his feet. He got into them hurriedly.

"How did we get here?" he asked, his astonished curiosity overcoming his disapproval of this immodest woman.

"By a mode of transportation common to my people in planetary atmospheres," she answered. "It's one of the things I propose to teach your people."

She sat down cross-legged on the grass. Montcalm averted his eyes, like the gentleman he was.

"You see," said Liz, "the people of your world are on the verge of going to space and joining the community of worlds. It's only natural the rest of us should wish to help you. We have a good many things to give you, to help you control the elements and natural conditions of your world. The weather, for example ..."

Suddenly, out of nowhere, a small cloud appeared above them and spread, blocking out the early sun. It began to rain, hard.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun and the cloud dissipated. Montcalm stood shivering in his soaked pajamas and Liz got to her feet, her skin glistening with moisture.

"You have a problem raising food for your population in some areas," she said....

A small haw-apple tree near them suddenly began to grow at an amazing rate of speed. It doubled its size in three minutes, put forth fruit and dropped it to the ground.

"These are only a few of the things I'll give to your planet," she said.

At her words, they were back in the bedroom. This time she had been thoughtful. Montcalm was still clad in wet pajamas.

"I don't know what sort of hypnosis this is," he began aggressively, "but you can't fool me, young lady, into believing ..."

Millie came into the room. She had donned a robe over her nightgown.

"Richard, where have you been with this woman?" she demanded.

"Why, my dear ..."

"You've been roaming around the house somewhere with her. I came in here a moment ago and you were gone. Now, Richard, I want you to do something about her and stop fooling around. I can't keep

the children in their room all day."

It hadn't been hypnosis then! Liz was for real. A vision rose before Montcalm of mankind given wonders, powers, benefits representing advances of thousands of years. The world could become a paradise with the things she offered to teach.

"Millie, this woman is from another planet!" he exclaimed excitedly, and turned to Liz. "Why did you choose me to contact on Earth?"

"Why, I happened to land near your house," she answered. "I know how your primitive social organization is set up, but isn't one human being just as good as another to lead me to the proper authorities?"

"Yes," he said joyfully, visualizing black headlines and his picture in the papers.

Millie stood to one side, puzzled and grim at once. Montcalm picked up the house dress he had taken from the closet earlier.

"Now, Miss," he said, "if you'll just put this on, I'll take you to the mayor and he can get in touch with Washington at once."

"I told you," said Liz, "I don't want to adopt your custom of wearing clothing."

"But you can't go out in public like that!" said the dismayed Montcalm. "If you're going to move among Earth people, you must dress as we do."

"My people wouldn't demand that Earth people disrobe to associate with us," she countered reasonably.

Millie had had enough. She went into action.

"You can argue with this hussy all you like, Richard, but I'm going to call the police," she said, and left the room with determination in her eye.

The next fifteen minutes were agonizing for Montcalm as he tried futilely to get Liz to dress like a decent person. He was torn between realization of what the things she offered would mean to the world and his own sense of the fitness of things. His children, the children of Traskmore, the children of the world ... what would be the effect on their tender morals to realize that a sane adult was willing to walk around in brazen nakedness?

There was a pounding on the front door, and the voice of Millie inviting the law into the house.

"Now I'm afraid you're due to go to jail," said Montcalm mournfully. "But when they get some clothes on you, I'll try to explain it and get you an audience with the mayor."

Two blue-clad policemen entered the room.

One policeman took the house dress from Montcalm's lax fingers and tossed it over Liz' head without further ado.

Liz did not struggle. She looked at Montcalm with a quizzical expression.

"I'm sorry," she said. "My people made a mistake. If you Earth people aren't tolerant enough to accept a difference in customs of dress, I'm afraid you're too immature."

With that, she was gone like a puff of air. The astonished policemen held an empty dress.

Montcalm didn't see the flying saucer that whizzed over Traskmore that morning and disappeared into the sky, but he didn't doubt the reports. He debated with himself for a long time whether he had taken the right attitude, but decided he had.

After all, there were the children to consider.

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A PRIZE ... FOR EDIE

By J. F. BONE

The Committee had, unquestionably, made a mistake. There was no doubt that Edie had

achieved the long-sought cancer cure ... but awarding the Nobel Prize was, nonetheless, a mistake ...

The letter from America arrived too late. The Committee had regarded acceptance as a foregone conclusion, for no one since Boris Pasternak had turned down a Nobel Prize. So when Professor Doctor Nels Christianson opened the letter, there was not the slightest fear on his part, or on that of his fellow committeemen, Dr. Eric Carlstrom and Dr. Sven Eklund, that the letter would be anything other than the usual routine acceptance.

“At last we learn the identity of this great research worker,” Christianson murmured as he scanned the closely typed sheets. Carlstrom and Eklund waited impatiently, wondering at the peculiar expression that fixed itself on Christianson’s face. Fine beads of sweat appeared on the professor’s high narrow forehead as he laid the letter down. “Well,” he said heavily, “now we know.”

“Know what?” Eklund demanded. “What does it say? Does she accept?”

“She accepts,” Christianson said in a peculiar half-strangled tone as he passed the letter to Eklund. “See for yourself.”

Eklund’s reaction was different. His face was a mottled reddish white as he finished the letter and handed it across the table to Carlstrom. “Why,” he demanded of no one in particular, “did this have to happen to us?”

“It was bound to happen sometime,” Carlstrom said. “It’s just our misfortune that it happened to us.” He chuckled as he passed the letter back to Christianson. “At least this year the presentation should be an event worth remembering.”

“It seems that we have a little problem,” Christianson said, making what would probably be the understatement of the century. Possibly there would be greater understatements in the remaining ninety-nine years of the Twenty-first Century, but Carlstrom doubted it. “We certainly have our necks out,” he agreed.

“We can’t do it!” Eklund exploded. “We simply can’t award the Nobel Prize in medicine and physiology to that ... that C. Edie!” He sputtered into silence.

“We can hardly do anything else,” Christianson said. “There’s no question as to the identity of the winner. Dr. Hanson’s letter makes that unmistakably clear. And there’s no question that the award is deserved.”

“We still could award it to someone else,” Eklund said.

“Not a chance. We’ve already said too much to the press. It’s known all over the world that the medical award is going to the discoverer of the basic cause of cancer, to the founder of modern neoplastic therapy.” Christianson grimaced. “If we changed our decision now, there’d be all sorts of embarrassing questions from the press.”

“I can see it now,” Carlstrom said, “the banquet, the table, the flowers, and Professor Doctor Nels Christianson in formal dress with the Order of St. Olaf gleaming across his white shirtfront, standing before that distinguished audience and announcing: ‘The Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology is awarded to—’ and then that deadly hush when the audience sees the winner.”

“You needn’t rub it in,” Christianson said unhappily. “I can see it, too.”

“These Americans!” Eklund said bitterly. He wiped his damp forehead. The picture Carlstrom had drawn was accurate but hardly appealing. “One simply can’t trust them. Publishing a report as important as that as a laboratory release. They should have given proper credit.”

“They did,” Carlstrom said. “They did—precisely. But the world, including us, was too stupid to see it. We have only ourselves to blame.”

“If it weren’t for the fact that the work was inspired and effective,” Christianson muttered, “we might have a chance of salvaging this situation. But through its application ninety-five per cent of cancers are now curable. It is obviously the outstanding contribution to medicine in the past five decades.”

“But we must consider the source,” Eklund protested. “This award will make the prize for medicine a laughingstock. No doctor will ever accept another. If we go through with this, we might as well forget about the medical award from now on. This will be its swan song. It hits too close to home. Too many people have been saying similar things about our profession and its trend toward specialization. And to have the Nobel Prize confirm them would alienate every doctor in the world. We simply can’t do it.”

“Yet who else has made a comparable discovery? Or one that is even half as important?” Christianson asked.

“That’s a good question,” Carlstrom said, “and a good answer to it isn’t going to be easy to find. For my part, I can only wish that Alphax Laboratories had displayed an interest in literature rather than medicine. Then our colleagues at the Academy could have had the painful decision.”

“Their task would be easier than ours,” Christianson said wearily. “After all, the criteria of art are more flexible. Medicine, unfortunately, is based upon facts.”

“That’s the hell of it,” Carlstrom said.

“There must be some way to solve this problem,” Eklund said. “After all it was a perfectly natural mistake. We never suspected that Alphax was a physical rather than a biological sciences laboratory. Perhaps that might offer grounds—”

“I don’t think so,” Carlstrom interrupted. “The means in this case aren’t as important as the results, and we can’t deny that the cancer problem is virtually solved.”

“Even though men have been saying for the past two generations that the answer was probably in the literature and all that was needed was someone with the intelligence and the time to put the facts together, the fact remains that it was C. Edie who did the job. And it required quite a bit more than merely collecting facts. Intelligence and original thinking of a high order was involved.” Christianson sighed.

“Someone,” Eklund said bitterly. “Some thing you mean. C. Edie—C.E.D.—Computer, Extrapolating, Discriminatory. Manufactured by Alphax Laboratories, Trenton, New Jersey, U.S.A. C. Edie! Americans!!—always naming things. A machine wins the Nobel Prize. It’s fantastic!”

Christianson shook his head. "It's not fantastic, unfortunately. And I see no way out. We can't even award the prize to the team of engineers who designed and built Edie. Dr. Hanson is right when he says the discovery was Edie's and not the engineers'. It would be like giving the prize to Albert Einstein's parents because they created him."

"Is there any way we can keep the presentation secret?" Eklund asked.

"I'm afraid not. The presentations are public. We've done too good a job publicizing the Nobel Prize. As a telecast item, it's almost the equal of the motion picture Academy Award."

"I can imagine the reaction when our candidate is revealed in all her metallic glory. A two-meter cube of steel filled with microminiaturized circuits, complete with flashing lights and cogwheels," Carlstrom chuckled. "And where are you going to hang the medal?"

Christianson shivered. "I wish you wouldn't give that metal nightmare a personality," he said. "It unnerves me. Personally, I wish that Dr. Hanson, Alphax Laboratories, and Edie were all at the bottom of the ocean—in some nice deep spot like the Mariannas Trench." He shrugged. "Of course, we won't have that sort of luck, so we'll have to make the best of it."

"It just goes to show that you can't trust Americans," Eklund said. "I've always thought we should keep our awards on this side of the Atlantic where people are sane and civilized. Making a personality out of a computer—ugh! I suppose it's their idea of a joke."

"I doubt it," Christianson said. "They just like to name things—preferably with female names. It's a form of insecurity, the mother fixation. But that's not important. I'm afraid, gentlemen, that we shall have to make the award as we have planned. I can see no way out. After all, there's no reason why the machine cannot receive the prize. The conditions merely state that it is to be presented to the one, regardless of nationality, who makes the greatest contribution to medicine or physiology."

"I wonder how His Majesty will take it," Carlstrom said.

"The king! I'd forgotten that!" Eklund gasped.

"I expect he'll have to take it," Christianson said. "He might even appreciate the humor in the situation."

"Gustaf Adolf is a good king, but there are limits," Eklund observed.

"There are other considerations," Christianson replied. "After all, Edie is the reason the Crown Prince is still alive, and Gustaf is fond of his son."

"After all these years?"

Christianson smiled. Swedish royalty was long-lived. It was something of a standing joke that King Gustaf would probably outlast the pyramids, providing the pyramids lived in Sweden. "I'm sure His Majesty will cooperate. He has a strong sense of duty and since the real problem is his, not ours, I doubt if he will shirk it."

"How do you figure that?" Eklund asked.

“We merely select the candidates according to the rules, and according to the nature of their contribution. Edie is obviously the outstanding candidate in medicine for this year. It deserves the prize. We would be compromising with principle if we did not award it fairly.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Eklund said gloomily. “I can’t think of any reasonable excuse to deny the award.”

“Nor I,” Carlstrom said. “But what did you mean by that remark about this being the king’s problem?”

“You forget,” Christianson said mildly. “Of all of us, the king has the most difficult part. As you know, the Nobel Prize is formally presented at a State banquet.”

“Well?”

“His Majesty is the host,” Christianson said. “And just how does one eat dinner with an electronic computer?”

THE END

Transcriber's Notes

This etext was produced from Analog Science Fact and Science Fiction April 1961. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

The following corrections were applied to this text:

Page 55: but awarding the Nobel Prize was, nonetheless{original had nonethelesss}, a mistake ...

Page 56: “It was bound to happen{original had happn} sometime,” Carlstrom said.

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_A discerning critic once pointed out that Edgar Allen Poe possessed not so much a distinctive style as a distinctive _manner_. So startlingly original was his approach to the dark castles and haunted woodlands of his own somber creation that he transcended the literary by the sheer magic of his prose. Something of that same magic gleams in the darkly-tapestried little fantasy presented here, beneath Evelyn Smith's eerily enchanted wand._

**the
doorway**

by ... Evelyn E. Smith

A man may wish he'd married his first love and not really mean it. But an insincere wish may turn ugly in dimensions unknown.

"It is my theory," Professor Falabella said, helping himself to a cookie, "that no one ever really makes a decision. What really happens is that whenever alternative courses of action are called for, the individuality splits up and continues on two or more divergent planes, very much like the parthenogenesis of a unicellular animal ... Delicious cookies these, Mrs. Hughes."

"Thank you, Professor," Gloria simpered. "I made them myself."

"You must give us the recipe," said one of the ladies--and the others murmured agreement, glad to get their individualities on a plane they could understand.

"Since most decisions are hardly as momentous as the individual imagines," Professor Falabella continued, "and since the imagination of the average individual is very limited, many of these different planes--or, as they are colloquially known, space-time continuums--may exist in close, even tangential relationship."

Gloria rose unobtrusively and took the teapot to the kitchen for a refill. Her husband stood by the sink moodily drinking whiskey out of the bottle so as to avoid having to wash a glass afterward.

"Bill, you're not being polite to our guests. Why don't you go out and listen to Professor Falabella?"

"I can hear him perfectly well from here," Bill muttered--and indeed the professor's mellifluous tones pervaded every nook and cranny of the thin-walled house. "Long-winded cultist! What is he a professor of, I'd like to know."

"Professor Falabella is not a cultist!" affirmed Gloria angrily. "He's a great philosopher."

Bill Hughes said something unprintable. "If I'd married Lucy Allison," he continued unkindly, "she'd never have filled the house with long-haired cultists on my so-called day of rest."

Gloria's soft chin trembled, and her blue eyes filled with tears. She was beginning to put on weight, he noticed. "I've been hearing nothing but Lucy Allison, Lucy Allison, Lucy Allison for the past year. Y-you said yourself she looked like a horse."

"Horses," he observed, "have sense."

He was being brutal, but he couldn't help it and didn't want to. Professor Falabella was only the most long-winded of a long series of mystics Gloria was forever dragging into the house. The trouble with

the half-educated_, he thought bitterly, _is that they seek culture in the most peculiar places_.

"I'll bet she would have let me have peace on Sunday," he said. "It just goes to show what happens when you marry a woman solely for her looks." He drained the bottle; then hurled it into the garbage pail with a resounding crash.

Gloria's shoulders shook as she filled the kettle. "I wish I'd decided to be an old maid," she sobbed.

A very unlikely possibility, he thought. Even now, shopworn as she was, Gloria could have a fairly wide range of suitors should something happen to him. She looked sexy, but how deceiving appearances could be!

Professor Falabella was still talking as Bill and Gloria emerged from the kitchen. "I believe that it is possible for an individual who exists on a limited plane of imagination to transpose from one plane to an adjacent one without difficulty ... Great Heavens, what was that?"

Something had whisked past the archway leading into the foyer.

"Don't pay any attention," Gloria smiled nervously. "The house is haunted."

"My dear," one of the ladies offered, "I know of the most marvelous exterminator--"

"The house," Gloria assured her coldly, "really _is_ haunted. We've been seeing things ever since we moved in."

And she really believed it, Bill thought. Believed that the house was haunted, that is. Of course he had seen things too--but he was enlightened enough to know that ghosts don't exist, even if you do see them.

Professor Falabella cleared his throat. "As I was saying, it is possible to send the individual through another--well, dimension, as some popular writers would have it, to one of his other spatial existences on the same temporal plane. It is merely necessary for him to find the Door."

"Nonsense!" Bill interrupted. "Holy, unmitigated nonsense!"

Every head swivelled to look at him. Gloria restrained tears with an effort.

"Brute," someone muttered.

But ridicule apparently only stimulated the professor. He beamed. "You

don't believe me. Your imagination cannot extend to the comprehension of the multifariousness of space."

"Nonsense," Bill said again, but less confidently.

"I believe that I have discovered the Doorway," Professor Falabella continued, "and the Way is Open. However, most people fear to penetrate the unknown, even though it is to enter another phase of their own existence. I do admit that the shock of spatial transference, no matter how slight, combined with the concrete awareness of a previous spatial relationship would be perhaps too much for the keenly sensitive individualism ..."

Bill opened his mouth.

"I know what you're about to say, young man!"

"You don't have to be a mind reader to know that," Bill assured him. His consonants were already a little slurred and he knew Gloria was ashamed of him. It served her right. He'd been ashamed of her for years.

Professor Falabella smiled. His teeth were very sharp and white. "Very well, Mr. Hughes, since you are a skeptic, perhaps you will not object to being the subject of our experiment yourself?"

"What kind of an experiment?" Bill asked suspiciously.

"Merely to go through the Door. Any door can become the Doorway, if it is transposed into the proper spatial dimension. That door, for instance." Professor Falabella waved his hand toward the doorway of what Gloria liked to call "Bill's study."

"You mean you just want me to open the door and go into that room?" Bill asked incredulously. "That's all?"

"That is all. Of course, you go with the awareness that it is the threshold of another plane and that you step voluntarily from this existence to an adjacent one."

"Sure," Bill said. He had just remembered there was a nearly full bottle of Calvert in the bottom drawer of the desk. "Sure. Anything to oblige."

"Very well. Go to the door, and keep remembering that of your own free will you are passing from this plane to the next."

"Look out, everybody!" Bill called raucously, as he pulled open the door. "I'm coming in on the next plane!"

No one laughed.

He stepped over the threshold, shutting the door firmly behind him. A wonderful excuse to get away from those blasted women. He'd climb out of the window as soon as he'd collected the whiskey and give them a nervous moment thinking he'd really passed into another existence. It would serve Gloria right.

For a moment, as he crossed, he had a queer sensation. Maybe there was something in what Professor Falabella said. But no, there he was in the study. All that mumbo jumbo was getting him down, that was all. He was a nervous man--only nobody appreciated the fact.

Taking a cigarette out of the pack in his pocket, he reached for the lighter on his desk. It wasn't there. Time and time again he'd told Gloria not to touch his things, and always she'd disobeyed him. Company was coming and she must tidy up. Cooking and cleaning--that was all she was good for. But this was carrying tidiness too far; she'd even removed the ashtrays.

And where did that glass block paperweight come from? He'd had a penguin in a snowstorm and he'd been happy with it. This was too much. He'd tell Gloria off. Stealing a man's penguin!

He opened the door into the living room and bumped into Lucy Allison. "Don't you think you've been in there long enough, Bill?" she asked acridly. "I'm sure your guests would appreciate catching a glimpse of you."

"Why, hello, Lucy," he said, surprised. "I didn't know Gloria had invited you--"

"Gloria, Gloria, Gloria!" Lucy cut across his sentence. "You've been talking about nothing but that dumb little blonde for months." Because of the people in the room beyond, her voice was pitched low, but her pale eyes glittered unpleasantly behind her spectacles. "I wish you had married her. You'd have made a fine pair."

Gently, caressingly, the short hairs on the back of Bill's neck rose.

"Come back in here," Lucy said, hauling him back into the living room where a number of people who had been enjoying the domestic fracas suddenly broke into loud and animated chatter. "Dr. Hildebrand was telling us all about nuclear fission."

"Can't find an ashtray," Bill muttered, seizing on something tangible. "Can't find an ashtray in the whole darn place."

"We've been over this millions of times, Bill. You know--" she smiled at the guests, a smile that carefully excluded Bill. "--I'm allergic to

smoke, but I never can get my husband to remember he isn't to smoke inside the house."

"Now take the neutron, for example," Dr. Hildebrand said through a mouthful of pâté. "What is the neutron? It is only ... What was that?"

The wraith of Gloria crossed the foyer and disappeared. Bill took a step forward; then stood still.

Lucy smiled self-consciously. "That's nothing at all. The house is merely haunted."

Everyone laughed.

"Forgot something," Bill muttered, and dashed back into the study. He yanked open the bottom drawer of the desk. Sure enough, there was a bottle of Schenley, nearly a third full. "There are some advantages," he thought as he tilted it to his lips, "in having a limited imagination."

Transcriber's Note:

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AS LONG AS YOU WISH

__If, somehow, you get trapped in a circular time system ... how long is the circumference of an infinitely retraced circle?__

By JOHN O'KEEFE

The patient sat stiffly in the leather chair on the other side of the desk. Nervously he pressed a coin into the palm of one hand.

"Just start anywhere," I said, "and tell me all about it."

"As before?" Without waiting for an answer, he continued, the coin clutched tightly in one hand. "I'm Charles J. Fisher, professor of Philosophy at Reiser College."

He looked at me quickly. "Or at least I was until recently." For a second his face was boyish. "Professor of Philosophy, that is."

I smiled and found that I was staring at the coin in his hand. He gave it to me. On one side I read the words: THE STATEMENT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS COIN IS FALSE. The patient watched me with an expressionless face; I turned over the coin. It was engraved with the words: THE STATEMENT ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS COIN IS FALSE.

"That's not the problem," he said, "not _my_ problem. I had the coin made when I was an undergraduate. I enjoyed reading one side, turning it over, reading the other side, and so on. A fiendish enjoyment like boys planning where to put the tipped-over outhouse."

I looked at the patient. He was thirty-eight, single, medium build, had an M.A. and Ph.D. from an eastern university. I knew this and more from the folder on my desk.

"Eight months ago," he continued, "I read about the sphere found on Paney Island." He stopped, looking at me questioningly.

"Yes, I know," I said. I opened my desk drawer, took out a clipping from the newspaper, and handed it to him.

"That's it."

I read the clipping before putting it back in the drawer.

Manila, Sept. 24 (INS) Archeologists from University of California have discovered in earth fault of recent quake a sphere two feet in diameter of an unidentifiable material.

Dr. Karl Schwartz, head of the group, said the sphere was returned to the University for study. He declined to answer questions on the cultural origin of the sphere.

"There wasn't any more in the newspapers about it," he said. "I have a friend in California who got me the photographs."

_He looked at me intently. "You won't believe any of this." He pressed the coin into the palm of his hand. "You won't be able to." _

"The photographs," he continued, as if lecturing, "were of characters projected by the sphere when placed before a focused light. The sphere was transparent, you see, imbedded with dark microscopic specks. By

moving the sphere a certain distance each time, there was a total projection of three hundred and sixty different characters in eighteen different orderings. Or nineteen different orderings if you count one which was a list of all the characters."

I made a mental note of the numbers. I felt they were significant.

"As I said," he continued, "I obtained the photographs of the characters. Very strange shapes, totally unlike the characters of Oriental languages, but yet that is the closest way to describe them." He jerked forward in his chair, "Except, of course, ostensibly."

"Later," I said. I wanted to get through the preliminaries first. There would be time later to see the photographs.

* * * * *

"The characters projected by the sphere," he said, "weren't like the characters of any known language." He paused dramatically. "There was reason to believe they had origin in an unknown culture. A culture more scientifically advanced than our own."

"And the reasons for this supposition?" I asked.

"The material ... the material of the sphere. It could only be roughly classified as _ferro-plastic_. Totally unknown, amazing imperviousness. A synthetic material, hardly the product of a former culture."

"From Mars?" I said, smiling.

"There were all kinds of conjectures, but, of course, the important thing was to see if the projection of characters was a message. The message, if any, would mean more than any conjecture."

"You translated it?"

He polished the coin on his jacket. "You won't dare believe it," he said sharply.

He cleared his throat and stiffened into a more rigid posture. "It wasn't exactly translation. You see, _to us_ none of the characters had designation. They were just characters."

"So it was a problem of decoding?" I asked.

"As it turned out, no. Decoding is dependent on knowledge of language characteristics--characteristics of known languages. Decoding was tried, but without success. No, what we had to find was a key to the language."

"You mean like the Rune Stone?"

"More or less. In principle, we needed a picture of a cow, and a sign of meaning indicating one of the characters.

"For me, there was no possibility of finding similarities between the characters and characters of other languages--that would require tremendous linguistic knowledge and library facilities. Nor could I use a decoding approach--that would require special knowledge of techniques and access to electronic computers and other mechanical aids. No, I had to work on the assumption that the key to the sphere was implicit in the sphere."

"You hoped to find the key to the language in the language itself?"

"Exactly. You know, of course, some languages do have an implicit key? For example hieroglyphics or picture language. The word for _cow_ is a picture of a cow."

He looked at the toes of his shoes. "You won't be able to believe it. It's impossible to believe. I use the word impossible in its logical sense.

"In most languages," he continued, looking up from his shoes, "the sound of some words themselves indicates the meaning of the word. Onomatopoeic words like _bowwow, buzz_."

"And the key to the unknown language?" I asked. "How did you find it?"

* * * * *

I watched him push the coin against the back of his arm, then lift it to read the backward letters pressed into his skin. He looked up at me and smiled.

"I built models of the characters. Big material ones, exactly proportionate to the ones projected. Then--quite by accident--I viewed one of them through a glass globe the size of the original sphere. What do you think I saw?"

"What?" I noticed he had the boyish look again.

"A distortion of the model. But that's not what's important. The distortions, on study, gave specific visual entities. Like when looking at one of those trick pictures and suddenly seeing the lion in the grass. The lines outlining the lion are there all the time, only the observer has to view them as the outline of a lion. It was the same with the models of the characters, except the shapes that appeared were

not of lions or other recognizable things. But they did suggest."

—He pressed the coin against his forehead, closed his eyes and appeared to be thinking deeply. "Yes, impossible to believe. No one can believe it." —

"In addition to the visual response, the distortions gave me definite feelings. Not mixtures of feelings, but one definite emotional experience."

"How do you mean?"

"One character when viewed through the globe gave me a visual image and, at the same time, a strong feeling of light hilarity."

"I take it then that these distortions seemed to connote meanings, rather than denote them. You might say that their meaning was conveyed through a Gestalt experience on the part of the observer."

"Yes, each character gave a definite Gestalt. But, the Gestalt was the same for each observer. Or at least for thirty-five observers there was an eighty per cent correlation."

I whistled softly. "And the translation?"

"Doctor, what would you say if I told you the translation was unbelievable; that it couldn't be seriously entertained by any man? What if I said that it would take the sanity of any man who believed it?"

"I would say that it might well be incorrect."

He took some papers from his pocket and laughed excitedly, slumping down in the chair. "This is the complete translation in idiomatic English. I'm going to let you read it, but first I want you to consider a few things."

He hid the papers behind the back of his chair; his face became even more boyish, almost as if he were deciding on where to put the tipped over outhouse.

"Consider first, doctor, that there was a total projection of three hundred and sixty different characters. The same number as the number of degrees in a circle. Consider also that there were eighteen different orderings of the characters, or nineteen counting the alphabetical list. The square root of three hundred and sixty would lie between eighteen and nineteen."

"Yes," I said. I remembered there was something significant about the

numbers, but I wasn't at all sure that it was this.

"Consider also," he continued, "that the communication was through the medium of a sphere. Moreover, keep in mind that physics accepts the path of a beam of light as its definition of a straight line. Yet, the path is a curve; if extended sufficiently it would be a circle, the section of a sphere."

"All right," I said. By now the patient was pounding the coin against the sole of one shoe.

"And," he said, "keep in mind that in some sense time can be thought of as another dimension." He suddenly thrust the papers at me and sat back in the chair.

I picked up the translation and began reading. The patient sat stiffly in the leather chair on the other side of the desk. Nervously he pressed a coin into the palm of one hand.

"Just start anywhere," I said, "and tell me all about it."

"As before?" Without waiting for an answer, he continued, the coin clutched tightly in one hand. "I'm Charles J. Fisher, professor of philosophy at Reiser College."

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The Good Neighbors

By Edgar Pangborn

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/26536/26536-h/26536-h.htm>

You can't blame an alien for a little inconvenience—as long as he makes up for it!

THE SHIP was sighted a few times, briefly and without a good fix. It was spherical, the estimated diameter about twenty-seven miles, and was in an orbit approximately 3400 miles from the surface of the Earth. No one observed the escape from it.

The ship itself occasioned some excitement, but back there at the tattered end of the 20th century, what was one visiting spaceship more or less? Others had appeared before, and gone away discouraged—or just not bothering. 3-dimensional TV was coming out of the experimental stage. Soon anyone could have Dora the Doll or the Grandson of Tarzan smack in his own living-room. Besides, it was a hot summer.

The first knowledge of the escape came when the region of Seattle suffered an eclipse of the sun, which was not an eclipse but a near shadow, which was not a shadow but a thing. The darkness drifted out of the northern Pacific. It generated thunder without lightning and without rain. When it had moved eastward and the hot sun reappeared, wind followed, a moderate gale. The coast was battered by sudden high waves, then hushed in a bewilderment of fog.

Before that appearance, radar had gone crazy for an hour.

The atmosphere buzzed with aircraft. They went up in readiness to shoot, but after the first sighting reports only a few miles offshore, that order was vehemently canceled—someone in charge must have had a grain of sense. The thing was not a plane, rocket or missile. It was an animal.

If you shoot an animal that resembles an inflated gas-bag with wings, and the wingspread happens to be something over four miles tip to tip, and the carcass drops on a city—it's not nice for the city.

The Office of Continental Defense deplored the lack of precedent. But actually none was needed. You just don't drop four miles of dead or dying alien flesh on Seattle or any other part of a swarming homeland. You wait till it flies out over the ocean, if it will—the most commodious ocean in reach.

IT, or rather she, didn't go back over the Pacific, perhaps because of the prevailing westerlies. After the Seattle incident she climbed to a great altitude above the Rockies, apparently using an updraft with very little wing-motion. There was no means of calculating her weight, or mass, or buoyancy. Dead or injured, drift might have carried her anywhere within one or two hundred miles. Then she seemed to be following the line of the Platte and the Missouri. By the end of the day she was circling interminably over the huge complex of St. Louis, hopelessly crying.

She had a head, drawn back most of the time into the bloated mass of the body but thrusting forward now and then on a short neck not more than three hundred feet in length. When she did that the blunt

turtle-like head could be observed, the gaping, toothless, suffering mouth from which the thunder came, and the soft-shining purple eyes that searched the ground but found nothing answering her need. The skin-color was mud-brown with some dull iridescence and many peculiar marks resembling weals or blisters. Along the belly some observers saw half a mile of paired protuberances that looked like teats.

She was unquestionably the equivalent of a vertebrate. Two web-footed legs were drawn up close against the cigar-shaped body. The vast, rather narrow, inflated wings could not have been held or moved in flight without a strong internal skeleton and musculature. Theorists later argued that she must have come from a planet with a high proportion of water surface, a planet possibly larger than Earth though of about the same mass and with a similar atmosphere. She could rise in Earth's air. And before each thunderous lament she was seen to breathe.

It was assumed that immense air sacs within her body were inflated or partly inflated when she left the ship, possibly with some gas lighter than nitrogen. Since it was inconceivable that a vertebrate organism could have survived entry into atmosphere from an orbit 3400 miles up, it was necessary to believe that the ship had briefly descended, unobserved and by unknown means, probably on Earth's night-side. Later on the ship did descend as far as atmosphere, for a moment ...

St. Louis was partly evacuated. There is no reliable estimate of the loss of life and property from panic and accident on the jammed roads and rail lines. 1500 dead, 7400 injured is the conservative figure.

AFTER a night and a day she abandoned that area, flying heavily eastward. The droning and swooping gnats of aircraft plainly distressed her. At first she had only tried to avoid them, but now and then during her eastward flight from St. Louis she made short desperate rushes against them, without skill or much sign of intelligence, screaming from a wide-open mouth that could have swallowed a four-engine bomber. Two aircraft were lost over Cincinnati, by collision with each other in trying to get out of her way. Pilots were then ordered to keep a distance of not less than ten miles until such time as she reached the Atlantic—if she did—when she could safely be shot down.

She studied Chicago for a day.

By that time Civil Defense was better prepared. About a million residents had already fled to open country before she came, and the loss of life was proportionately smaller. She moved on. We have no clue to the reason why great cities should have attracted her, though apparently they did. She was hungry perhaps, or seeking help, or merely drawn in animal curiosity by the endless motion of the cities and the strangeness. It has even been suggested that the life forms of her homeland—her masters—resembled humanity. She moved eastward, and religious organizations united to pray that she would come down on one of the lakes where she could safely be destroyed. She didn't.

She approached Pittsburgh, choked and screamed and flew high, and soared in weary circles over Buffalo for a day and a night. Some pilots who had followed the flight from the West Coast claimed that the vast lamentation of her voice was growing fainter and hoarser while she was drifting along the line of the Mohawk Valley. She turned south, following the Hudson at no great height. Sometimes she appeared to be choking, the labored inhalations harsh and prolonged, like a cloud in agony.

When she was over Westchester, headquarters tripled the swarm of interceptors and observation planes. Squadrons from Connecticut and southern New Jersey deployed to form a monstrous funnel, the small end before her, the large end pointing out to open sea. Heavy bombers closed in above, laying a smoke screen at 10,000 feet to discourage her from rising. The ground shook with the drone of jets, and with

her crying.

Multitudes had abandoned the metropolitan area. Other multitudes trusted to the subways, to the narrow street canyons and to the strength of concrete and steel. Others climbed to a thousand high places and watched, trusting the laws of chance.

She passed over Manhattan in the evening—between 8:14 and 8:27 P.M., July 16, 1976—at an altitude of about 2000 feet. She swerved away from the aircraft that blanketed Long Island and the Sound, swerved again as the southern group buzzed her instead of giving way. She made no attempt to rise into the sun-crimsoned terror of drifting smoke.

THE plan was intelligent. It should have worked, but for one fighter pilot who jumped the gun.

He said later that he himself couldn't understand what happened. It was court-martial testimony, but his reputation had been good. He was Bill Green—William Hammond Green—of New London, Connecticut, flying a one-man jet fighter, well aware of the strictest orders not to attack until the target had moved at least ten miles east of Sandy Hook. He said he certainly had no previous intention to violate orders. It was something that just happened in his mind. A sort of mental sneeze.

His squadron was approaching Rockaway, the flying creature about three miles ahead of him and half a mile down. He was aware of saying out loud to nobody: "Well, she's too big." Then he was darting out of formation, diving on her, giving her one rocket-burst and reeling off to the south at 840 MPH.

He never did locate or rejoin his squadron, but he made it somehow back to his home field. He climbed out of the cockpit, they say, and fell flat on his face.

It seems likely that his shot missed the animal's head and tore through some part of her left wing. She spun to the left, rose perhaps a thousand feet, facing the city, sideslipped, recovered herself and fought for altitude. She could not gain it. In the effort she collided with two of the following planes. One of them smashed into her right side behind the wing, the other flipped end over end across her back, like a swatted dragonfly. It dropped clear and made a mess on Bedloe's Island.

She too was falling, in a long slant, silent now but still living. After the impact her body thrashed desolately on the wreckage between Lexington and Seventh Avenues, her right wing churning, then only trailing, in the East River, her left wing a crumpled slowly deflating mass concealing Times Square, Herald Square and the garment district.

At the close of the struggle her neck extended, her turtle beak grasping the top of Radio City. She was still trying to pull herself up, as the buoyant gasses hissed and bubbled away through the gushing holes in her side. Radio City collapsed with her.

For a long while after the roar of descending rubble and her own roaring had ceased, there was no human noise except a melancholy thunder of the planes.

THE apology came early next morning.

The spaceship was observed to descend to the outer limits of atmosphere, very briefly. A capsule was released, with a parachute timed to open at 40,000 feet and come down quite neatly in Scarsdale. Parachute, capsule and timing device were of good workmanship.

The communication engraved on a plaque of metal (which still defies analysis) was a hasty job, the English slightly odd, with some evidence of an incomplete understanding of the situation. That the visitors were themselves aware of these deficiencies is indicated by the text of the message itself.

Most sadly regret inexcusable escape of livestock. While petting same, one of our children monkeyed (sp?) with airlock. Will not happen again. Regret also imperfect grasp of language, learned through what you term Television etc. Animal not dangerous, but observe some accidental damage caused, therefore hasten to enclose reimbursement, having taken liberty of studying your highly ingenious methods of exchange. Hope same will be adequate, having estimated deplorable inconvenience to best of ability. Regret exceedingly impossibility of communicating further, as pressure of time and prior obligations forbids. Please accept heartfelt apologies and assurances of continuing esteem.

The reimbursement was in fact properly enclosed with the plaque, and may be seen by the public in the rotunda of the restoration of Radio City. Though technically counterfeit, it looks like perfectly good money, except that Mr. Lincoln is missing one of his wrinkles and the words "FIVE DOLLARS" are upside down.

—EDGAR PANGBORN
Transcriber's note:

This story was published in Galaxy magazine, June 1960. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

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BLESSED ARE THE MEEK
BY G. C. EDMONDSON

*_Every strength is a weakness, and every weakness is a strength.
And when the Strong start smashing each other's strength ... the
Weak may turn out to be, instead, the Wise._*

The strangers landed just before dawn, incinerating a good li of bottom land in the process. Their machines were already busily digging up the topsoil. The Old One watched, squinting into the morning sun. He sighed, hitched up his saffron robes and started walking down toward the strangers.

Griffin turned, not trying to conceal his excitement. "You're the linguist, see what you can get out of him."

"I might," Kung Su ventured sourly, "if you'd go weed the air machine or something. This is going to be hard enough without a lot of kibitzers cramping my style and scaring Old Pruneface here half to death."

"I see your point," Griffin answered. He turned and started back toward the diggings. "Let me know if you make any progress with the local language." He stopped whistling and strove to control the jauntiness of his gait. _Must be the lower gravity and extra oxygen_, he thought. _I haven't bounced along like this for thirty years. Nice place to settle down if some promoter doesn't turn it into an old folks home._ He sighed and glanced over the diggings. The rammed earth walls were nearly obliterated by now. _Nothing lost_, he reflected. _It's all on tape and they're no different from a thousand others at any rate._

* * * * *

Griffin opened a door in the transparent bubble from which Albañez was operating the diggers. "Anything?" he inquired.

"Nothing so far," Albañez reported. "What's the score on this job? I missed the briefing."

"How'd you make out on III, by the way?"

"Same old stuff, pottery shards and the usual junk. See it once and you've seen it all."

"Well," Griffin began, "it looks like the same thing here again. We've pretty well covered this system and you know how it is. Rammed earth walls here and there, pottery shards, flint, bronze and iron artifacts and that's it. They got to the iron age on every planet and then blooey."

"Artifacts all made for humanoid hands I suppose. I wonder if they were close enough to have crossbred with humans."

"I couldn't say," Griffin observed dryly. "From the looks of Old Pruneface I doubt if we'll ever find a human female with sufficiently detached attitude to find out."

"Who's Pruneface?"

"He came ambling down out of the hills this morning and walked into camp."

"You mean you've actually found a live humanoid?"

"There's got to be a first time for everything." Griffin opened the door and started climbing the hill toward Kung Su and Pruneface.

* * * * *

"Well, have you gotten beyond the 'me, Charlie' stage yet?" Griffin inquired at breakfast two days later.

Kung Su gave an inscrutable East Los Angeles smile. "As a matter of fact, I'm a little farther along. Joe is amazingly coöperative."

"Joe?"

"Spell it Chou if you want to be exotic. It's still pronounced Joe and that's his name. The language is monosyllabic and tonal. I happen to know a similar language."

"You mean this humanoid speaks Chinese?" Griffin was never sure whether

Kung was ribbing him or not.

"Not Chinese. The vocabulary is different but the syntax and phonemes are nearly identical. I'll speak it perfectly in a week. It's just a question of memorizing two or three thousand new words. Incidentally, Joe wants to know why you're digging up his bottom land. He was all set to flood it today."

"Don't tell me he plants rice!" Griffin exclaimed.

"I don't imagine it's rice, but it needs flooding whatever it is."

"Ask him how many humanoids there are on this planet."

"I'm way ahead of you, Griffin. He says there are only a few thousand left. The rest were all destroyed in a war with the barbarians."

"Barbarians?"

"They're extinct."

"How many races were there?"

"I'll get to that if you'll stop interrupting," Kung rejoined testily.

"Joe says there are only two kinds of people, his own dark, straight-haired kind and the barbarians. They have curly hair, white skin and round eyes. You'd pass for a barbarian, according to Joe, only you don't have a faceful of hair. He wants to know how things are going on the other planets."

"I suppose that's my cue to break into a cold sweat and feel a premonition of disaster." Griffin tried to smile and almost made it.

"Not necessarily, but it seems our iron-age man is fairly well informed in extraplanetary affairs."

"I guess I'd better start learning the language."

* * * * *

Thanks to the spade work Kung Su had done in preparing hypno-recordings, Griffin had a working knowledge of the Rational People's language eleven days later when he sat down to drink herb infused hot water with Joe and other Old Ones in the low-roofed wooden building around which clustered a village of two hundred humanoids. He fidgeted through interminable ritualistic cups of hot water. Eventually Joe hid his hands in the sleeves of his robe and turned with an air of polite inquiry. _Now we get down to business_, Griffin thought.

"Joe, you know by now why we're digging up your bottom land. We'll recompense you in one way or another. Meanwhile, could you give me a little local history?"

Joe smiled like a well nourished bodhisattva. "Approximately how far back would you like me to begin?"

"At the beginning."

"How long is a year on your planet?" Joe inquired.

"Your year is eight and a half days longer. Our day is three hundred heartbeats longer than yours."

Joe nodded his thanks. "More water?"

Griffin declined, suppressing a shudder.

"Five million years ago we were limited to one planet," Joe began. "The court astronomer had a vision of our planet in flames. I imagine you'd say our sun was about to nova. The empress was disturbed and ordered a convocation of seers. One fasted overlong and saw an answer. As the dying seer predicted the Son of Heaven came with fire-breathing dragons. The fairest of maidens and the strongest of our young men were taken to serve his warriors. We served them honestly and faithfully. A thousand years later their empire collapsed leaving us scattered across the universe. Three thousand years later a new race of barbarians conquered our planets. We surrendered naturally and soon were serving our new masters. Five hundred years passed and they destroyed themselves. This has been the pattern of our existence from that day to this."

"You mean you've been slaves for five million years?" Griffin was incredulous.

"Servitude has ever been a refuge for the scholar and the philosopher."

"But what point is there in such a life? Why do you continue living this way?"

"What is the point in any way of life? Continued existence. Personal immortality is neither desirable nor possible. We settled for perpetuation of the race."

"But what about self-determination? You know enough astronomy to understand novae. Surely you realize it could happen again. What would you do without a technology to build spaceships?"

"Many stars have gone nova during our history. Usually the barbarians

came in time. When they didn't--"

"You mean you don't really care?"

"All barbarians ask that sooner or later," Joe smiled. "Sometimes toward the end they even accuse us of destroying them. We don't. Every technology bears the seeds of its own destruction. The stars are older than the machinery that explores them."

"You used technology to get from one system to another."

"We used it, but we were never part of it. When machines fail, their people die. We have no machines."

"What would you do if this sun were to nova?"

"We can serve you. We are not unintelligent."

"Willing to work your way around the galaxy, eh? But what if we refused to take you?"

"The race would go on. Kung Su tells me there is no life on planets of this system, but there are other systems."

"You're whistling in the dark," Griffin scoffed. "How do you know if any of the Rational People survive?"

"How far back does your history go?" Joe inquired.

"It's hard to say exactly," Griffin replied. "Our earliest written records date back some seven thousand years."

"You are all of one race?"

"No, you may have noticed Kung Su is slightly different from the rest of us."

"Yes, Griffin, I have noticed. When you return ask Kung Su for the legend of creation. More hot water?" Joe stirred and Griffin guessed the interview was over. He drank another ritual cup, made his farewells and walked thoughtfully back to camp.

* * * * *

"Kung," Griffin asked over coffee next afternoon, "how well up are you on Chinese mythology?"

"Oh, fair, I guess. It isn't my field but I remember some of the stories my grandfather used to tell me."

"What is your legend of creation?" Griffin persisted.

"It's pretty well garbled but I remember something about the Son of Heaven bringing the early settlers from a land of two moons on the back of his fire-breathing dragon. The dragon got sick and died so they couldn't ever get back to heaven again. There's a lot of stuff about devils, too."

"What about devils?"

"I don't remember too well, but they were supposed to do terrible things to you and even to your unborn children if they ever caught you. They must have been pretty stupid though; they couldn't turn corners. My grandfather's store had devil screens at all the doors so you had to turn a corner to get in. The first time I saw the lead baffles at the pile chamber doors on this ship it reminded me of home sweet home. By the way, some young men from the village were around today. They want to work passage to the next planet. What do you think?"

Griffin was silent for a long time.

"Well, what do you say? We can use some hand labor for the delicate digging. Want to put them on?"

"Might as well." Griffin answered. "There's a streetcar every millennium anyway."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You wouldn't understand. You sold your birthright to the barbarians."

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Something Will Turn Up

by David Mason

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*Err ... maybe it had to do with this being a non-Parity universe, perhaps?
Some things can't be simply inverted, after all....*

"You, Mr. Rapp?"

Stanley Rapp blinked, considering the matter. He always thought over everything very carefully. Of course, some questions were easier to answer than others. This one, for instance. He had very few doubts about his name.

"Uh," Stanley Rapp said. "Yes. Yes."

He stared at the bearded young man. Living in the Village, even on the better side of it, one saw beards every day, all shapes and sizes of beard. This one was not a psychoanalyst beard, or a folk singer beard; not even an actor beard. This was the scraggly variety, almost certainly a poet beard. Mr. Rapp, while holding no particular prejudice against poets, had not sent for one, he was sure of that.

Then he noticed the toolcase in the bearded young man's hand, lettered large LIGHTNING SERVICE, TV, HI-FI.

"Oh," Stanley said, nodding. "You're the man to fix the TV set."

"You know it, Dad," the young man said, coming in. He shut the door behind him, and stared around the apartment. "What a wild pad. Where the idiot box, hey?"

The pleasantly furnished, neat little apartment was not what Mr. Rapp had ever thought of as a "wild pad." But the Village had odd standards, Mr. Rapp knew. Chacun a son gout, he had said, on moving into the apartment ten years ago. Not aloud, of course, because he had only taken one year of French, and would never have trusted his accent. But chacun a son gout, anyway.

"The television set," Mr. Rapp said, translating. "Oh, yes." He went to the closet door and opened it. Reaching inside, he brought out an imposingly large TV set, mounted on a wheeled table. The bearded repairman whistled.

"In the closet," the repairman said, admiringly. "Crazy. You go in there to watch it, or you let it talk to itself?"

"Oh. Well, I don't exactly watch it at all," Mr. Rapp said, a little sadly. "I mean, I can't. That's why I called you."

"Lightning's here, have no fear," the bearded one said, approaching the set with a professional air.

"Like, in the closet, hey." He bent over the set, appraisingly. "I thought you were a square, Pops, but I can see you're.... Hey, this is like too much. Man, I don't want to pry, but why is this box upside down?"

"I wish I knew," Mr. Rapp said. He sat down, and leaned back, sighing. This was going to be difficult, he knew. He had already had to explain it to the last three repairmen, and he was getting tired of explaining. Although he thought, somehow, that this young man might understand it a little more quickly than the others had.

"I've had a couple of other repairmen look it over," Mr. Rapp told the bearded one. "They ... well, they gave up."

"Dilettantes," commented the beard.

"Oh, no," Mr. Rapp said. "One of them was from the company that made it. But they couldn't do anything."

"Let's try it," the repairman said, plugging the cord into a wall socket. He returned to the set, and switched it on, without changing its upside down position. The big screen lit almost at once; a pained face appeared, with a large silhouetted hammer striking the image's forehead in a rhythmic beat.

"... Immediate relief from headache," a bland voice said, as the pictured face broke into a broad smile. The repairman shuddered, and turned down the sound, staring at the image with widened eyes as he did so.

"Dad, I don't want to bug you," the repairman said, his eyes still on the screen, "only, look. The set is upside down, right?"

"Right," said Mr. Rapp.

"Only the picture—" the repairman paused, trying to find the right phrase. "I mean, the picture's flipped. Like, it's wrong side up, too. Only, right side up, now."

"Exactly," said Mr. Rapp. "You see, that's the trouble. I put the set upside down because of that."

"Cool," the repairman said, watching the picture. "I mean, so why worry? You got a picture, right? You want me to turn the picture around? I can do that with a little fiddling around inside the set ... uh-oh. Dad, something's happening."

The repairman bent closer, staring at the picture. It was now showing a busty young woman singer, her mouth opened, but silent, since the sound was turned down. She was slowly rotating as Rapp and the bearded repairman watched, turning until her face, still mouthing silent song, hung upside down on the screen.

"It always does that," Rapp said. "No matter which way I put the set, the picture's always upside down."

"No, man," the repairman said, pleadingly. "Look, I took a course. I mean, the best school, you dig? It don't work that way. It just can't."

"It does, though," Rapp pointed out. "And that's what the other repair people said, too. They took it out, and brought it back, and it still did it. Not when they had it in their shops, but the minute it came back here, the picture went upside down again."

"Wow," the repairman said, backing slowly away from the set, but watching it with the tense gaze of a man who expected trouble. After a minute he moved toward it again, and took hold of the cabinet sides, lifting.

"I don't want to put you down, Pops," he said, grunting. "Only, I got to see this. Over she goes." He set it down again, right side up. The picture, still the singer's face, remained in a relatively upright position for another moment, and then slowly rolled over, upside down again.

"You see," Mr. Rapp said, shrugging. "I guess I'll have to buy another set. Except I'd hate to have it happen again, and this one did cost quite a lot."

"You couldn't trade it in, either," the repairman agreed. "Not to me, anyway." Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "Hey now. Sideways?"

"You mean on its side?"

"Just for kicks...." the repairman gripped the set again. "On the side...." He set the cabinet down, on one side, and stepped back, to regard the picture again.

Slowly, the picture turned once more, and once again, relative to the usual directions of up and down, the picture was stubbornly, completely inverted.

"It's onto that, too," the repairman said, gloomily. He sat down on the floor, and assumed a kind of Yoga posture, peering between his legs. "You could try it this way, Pops."

"I'm pretty stiff," Mr. Rapp told him, shaking his head.

"Yeah," the repairman said, reinverting himself. For a long while he sat, pulling his beard thoughtfully, a look of deep thought on his face. The reversed singer faded out, to give place to an earnestly grinning announcer who pointed emphatically to a large, upside down sign bearing the name of a product.

"Watching it this way could get to be a fad," the repairman said, at last, almost inaudibly. He fell silent again, and Mr. Rapp, sadly, began to realize that even this bearded and confident young man had apparently been stopped, like the others.

"The way I look at it, like, there's a place where science hangs up," the bearded one spoke, finally.

"Like, I don't want to put down my old Guru at the Second Avenue School of Electronics," he added, solemnly. "But you got to admit that there are things not dreamed of in your philosophy, Horatio. You dig?"

"My name isn't Horatio," Mr. Rapp objected.

"I was quoting," the repairman told him. "I mean, this is a thing like, outside material means. Supernatural, sort of. Did you cross up any witches lately, Pops?"

"Oh, dear," Mr. Rapp said sadly. He shook his head. "No, I haven't ... er, offended any witches. Not that I know of." He regarded the inverted picture for a moment. Then, as the repairman's words began to sink in, Mr. Rapp looked at him apprehensively.

"Witches?" Mr. Rapp asked. "But ... I mean, that's all superstition, isn't it? And anyway ... well, television sets!"

"They used to dry up cows, but who keeps cows?" the bearded one said ominously. "Why not television sets? Like, I happen to be personally acquainted with several witches and like that. The Village is full of them. However—" He rose, and stalked toward the set, his eyes glittering in a peculiar way. "You're a lucky one, Daddyo. Back in my square days, I did some reading up on the hookups between poetry and magic. Now, I'm a poet. Therefore, and to wit, I'm also a magician. On this hangup, I'm going to try magic. Electronics won't work, that's for sure."

"But...." Mr. Rapp was not quite sure why he disapproved, but he did. On the other hand, the repairman appeared to be very definitely sure of what he was doing, as he peered into the back of the television set.

"Have you ever tried ... ah, this method before?"

"Never ran into any hexed TV sets before," the repairman said, straightening up. "Don't worry, though. I got the touch, like with poetry. Same thing, in fact. All magic spells rhyme, see? Well, I used to rhyme, back before I really started swinging. Anybody can rhyme. And the rest is just instinct."

He had been scribbling something on a notepad, as he spoke. Now he bent down, to take another look at the back of the set, and nodded with an air of assurance.

"The tube layout," the repairman told Mr. Rapp, exhibiting his notebook. "That, and Ohm's Law, and a couple of Hindu bits I picked up listening to the UN on the radio ... makes a first-class spell."

Mr. Rapp backed away, nervously. "Look, if it's all the same to you...."

"Don't flip." The repairman consulted his notebook, and moved to stand in front of the screen. The picture showed a smiling newscaster, pointing to a map which indicated something ominous.

"Cool, man," the repairman said. "Here we go." He lifted his hands in an ecclesiastical gesture, and his voice became a deep boom.

"6SN7, 6ac5, six and seven millivolts are running down the line, E equals R times A , that's the way it goes, go round the other way, Subhas Chandra BOSE!"

Afterward, Mr. Rapp was never quite sure exactly what happened. He had an impression of a flash of light, and an odd, indefinite sound rather like the dropping of a cosmic garbage can lid. But possibly neither the light nor the sound actually happened; at any rate, there were no complaints from the neighbors later on. However, the lighted screen was certainly doing something.

"Crazy!" the repairman said, in awed tones.

Mr. Rapp, his view partly blocked by the repairman, could not see exactly what was happening on the screen. However, he caught a brief glimpse of the newscaster's face. It was right side up, but no longer smiling. Instead, the pictured face wore a look of profound alarm, and the newsman was apparently leaning far forward, his face almost out of focus because of its nearness to the lens. Just for a moment, Mr. Rapp could have sworn he saw a chair floating up, past the agonized expression on the screen.

Then the screen went gray, and a panel of lettering appeared, shaking slightly.

OUR PICTURE HAS BEEN TEMPORARILY INTERRUPTED. NORMAL SERVICE WILL BE RESTORED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. PLEASE STAND BY.

"I was going to give you a bill," the repairman said. "Only maybe we better just charge it up to customer relations."

The letters remained steady on the screen, and Mr. Rapp studied them. They were right side up.

"You fixed it," Mr. Rapp said, a little uncertainly. "I mean, it's working. I ought to pay...."

"I goofed," the repairman said. He picked up his tools, and moved toward the door. "Like, I won't mention it to anybody if you won't. But I goofed, all right. Didn't you see the picture?"

"But whatever you did ... it worked," Mr. Rapp said. "The picture's right side up."

"I know," the repairman said. "Only somewhere ... there's a studio that's upside down. I just goofed, Pops, that's all."

He closed the door behind him, leaving Mr. Rapp still staring at the immobile, right-side-up message on the glowing screen.

The End.

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the putnam tradition

By Sonya Dorman

*Through generations
the power has descended,
now weaker, now stronger.
And which way did the
power run in the four-year-old
in the garden, playing*

with a pie plate?_

It was an old house not far from the coast, and had descended generation by generation to the women of the Putnam family. Progress literally went by it: a new four-lane highway had been built two hundred yards from the ancient lilacs at the doorstep. Long before that, in the time of Cecily Putnam's husband, power lines had been run in, and now on cold nights the telephone wires sounded like a concert of cellos, while inside with a sound like the breaking of beetles, the grandmother Cecily moved through the walls in the grooves of tradition.

Simone Putnam, her granddaughter; Nina Putnam, her great-granddaughter; the unbroken succession of matriarchs continued, but times the old woman thought that in Simone it was weakened, and she looked at the four-year-old Nina askance, waiting, waiting, for some good sign.

Sometimes one of the Putnam women had given birth to a son, who grew sickly and died, or less often, grew healthy and fled. The husbands were usually strangers to the land, the house, and the women, and spent a lifetime with the long-lived Putnam wives, and died, leaving their strange signs: telephone wires, electric lights, water pumps, brass plumbing.

Sam Harris came and married Simone, bringing with him an invasion of washer, dryer, toaster, mixer, coffeemaker, until the current poured through the walls of the house with more vigor than the blood in the old woman's veins.

"You don't approve of him," Simone said to her grandmother.

"It's his trade," Cecily Putnam answered. "Our men have been carpenters, or farmers, or even schoolmasters. But an engineer. Phui!"

Simone was washing the dishes, gazing out across the windowsill where two pink and white Murex shells stood, to the tidy garden beyond where Nina was engaged in her private games.

She dried the dishes by passing her hand once above each plate or glass, bringing it to a dry sparkle. It saved wear on the dishtowels, and it amused her.

"Sam's not home very much," she said in a placating voice. She herself had grown terrified, since her marriage, that she wouldn't be able to bear the weight of her past. She felt its power on her and couldn't carry it. Cecily had brought her up, after her father had disappeared and her mother had died in an unexplained accident. Daily she saw the reflection of her failure in the face of her grandmother, who seemed built of the same seasoned and secure wood as the old Putnam house.

Simone looked at her grandmother, whom she loved, and became a mere vapor.

"He's not home so much," Simone said.

* * * *

Her face was small, with a pointed chin, and she had golden-red hair which she wore loose on her shoulders. Nina, too, had a small face, but it was neither so pale nor so delicate as her mother's, as if Sam's tougher substance had filled her out and strengthened her bone structure. If it was true that she, Simone, was a weak link, then Sam's strength might have poured into the child, and there would be no more Putnam family and tradition.

"People don't change that easily," the old woman said.

"But things--" Simone began. The china which had a history of five generations slipped out of her hands and smashed; Sam's toaster wouldn't toast or pop up; Simone couldn't even use the telephone for fear of getting a wrong number, or no number at all.

"Things, things!" her grandmother cried. "It's blood that counts. If the blood is strong enough, things dissolve. They're just garbage, all those things, floating on the surface of our history. It's our history that's deep. That's what counts."

"You're afraid of Sam," the young woman accused.

"Not afraid of any man!" Cecily said, straightening her back. "But I'm afraid for the child. Sam has no family tradition, no depth, no talent handed down and perfected. A man with his head full of wheels and wires."

Simone loved him. She leaned on him and grew about him, and he supported her tenderly. She wasn't going to give him up for the sake of some abstract tradition--

"--it's not abstract," her grandmother said with spirit. "It's in your blood. Or why don't you sweep the floors the way other women do? The way Sam's mother must?"

Simone had begun to clean the house while she was thinking, moving her hand horizontally across the floor, at the height of her hip, and the dust was following the motion of her hand and moving in a small, sun-brightened river toward the trash basket in the kitchen corner. Now Simone raised her hand to her face to look at it, and the river of dust rose like a serpent and hung a foot below her hand.

"Yes," she agreed, "at least I can clean the house. If I don't touch the good china, and look where I'm going."

"Phui," the old woman said again, angrily. "Don't feel so sorry for yourself."

"Not for myself," Simone mumbled, and looked again toward the garden where her daughter was doing something with three stones and a pie plate full of spring water.

"I do despair of Nina," Cecily said, as she had said before. "She's four, and has no appearance. Not even balance. She fell out of the applerose tree, and couldn't even help herself." Suddenly the old woman thrust her face close to her granddaughter. It was smooth, round, and sweet as a young kernel of corn. The eyes, sunk down under the bushy grey brows, were cold and clear grey.

"Simone," the old woman said. "You didn't lie to me? You did know she was falling, and couldn't get back in time to catch her?"

A shudder passed through Simone's body. There was no blood in her veins, only water; no marrow in her bones, they were empty, and porous as a bird's. Even the roots of her hair were weak, and now the sweat was starting out on her scalp as she faced her grandmother and saw the bristling shapes of seven generations of Putnam women behind her.

"You lied," the old woman said. "You didn't know she was falling."

Simone was a vapor, a mere froth blowing away on the first breeze.

"My poor dear," the old woman said in a gentle voice. "But how could you marry someone like Sam? Don't you know what will happen? He'll dissolve us, our history, our talents, our pride. Nina is nothing but an ordinary little child."

"She's a good child," Simone said, trying not to be angry. She wanted her child to be loved, to be strong. "Nina isn't a common child," she said, with her head bent. "She's very bright."

"A man with his head full of wheels, who's at home with electricity and wires," the old woman went on. "We've had them before, but never allowed them to dominate us. My own husband was such a man, but he was only allowed to make token gestures, such as having the power lines put in. He never understood how they worked." She lowered her voice to a whisper, "Your Sam understands. I've heard him talk to the water pump."

"That's why you're afraid of him," Simone said. "Not because I'm weak, and he might take something away from me, but because he's strong, and he might give us something. Then everything would change, and you're

afraid of that. Nina might be our change." She pointed toward the garden.

* * * * *

Following the white line of her granddaughter's finger, Cecily looked out into the garden and saw Nina turn toward them as though she knew they were angry. The child pointed with one finger directly at them in the house. There was a sharp crackle, and something of a brilliant and vibrating blue leaped between the out-stretched fingers of mother and daughter, and flew up like a bird to the power lines above.

"Mommy," Nina called.

Simone's heart nearly broke with wonder and fright. Her grandmother contemptuously passed through the kitchen door and emerged on the step outside, but Simone opened the door and left it open behind her. "What was that?" she asked Nina. "Was it a bluebird?"

"Don't be silly," Nina said. She picked up the pie plate and brought it toward them. Cecily's face was white and translucent, one hand went to her throat as the child approached.

Brimfull of crackling blue fire with a fluctuating heart of yellow, the pie plate came toward them, held between Nina's small, dusty hands. Nina grinned at them. "I stole it out of the wires," she said.

Simone thought she would faint with a mixture of joy and fear. "Put it back," she whispered. "Please put it back."

"Oh Mommy," Nina said, beginning to whine. "Not now. Not right away. I just got it. I've done it lots of times." The pie plate crackled and hissed in the steady, small hands.

Simone could feel the old woman's shocked silence behind her. "You mustn't carry it in a pie plate, it's dangerous," Simone said to her child, but she could see Nina was in no danger. "How often have you done this?" She could feel her skirt and her hair billow with electricity.

"Lots of times. You don't like it, do you?" She became teasing and roguish, when she looked most like Sam. Suddenly she threw back her head and opened her mouth, and tilting up the pie plate she drank it empty. Her reddish gold hair sprang out in crackling rays around her face, her eyes flashed and sparks flew out between her teeth before she closed her mouth.

"Nina!" the old woman cried, and began to crumple, falling slowly against Simone in a complete faint. Simone caught her in trembling hands and lowered her gently. She said to her daughter, "You mustn't do that

in front of Grandy. You're a bad girl, you knew it would scare her," and to herself she said: I must stop babbling, the child knows I'm being silly. O isn't it wonderful, isn't it awful, O Sam, how I love you.

"Daddy said it would scare you," Nina admitted. "That's why I never showed you before." Her hair was softly falling into place again, and she was gazing curiously at her great-grandmother lying on the doorstep.

"It did scare me," Simone said. "I'm not used to it, darling. But don't keep it secret any more."

"Is Grandy asleep?"

Simone said hastily, "Oh yes, she's taking a nap. She is old, you know, and likes to take naps."

"That's not a nap," Nina said, leaning over and patting the old woman's cheek, "I think she's having a bad dream."

Simone carried her grandmother into the house. If that old, tired heart had jumped and floundered like her own, there must be some damage done to it. If anything happened to her grandmother, the world would end, Simone thought, and was furious with Nina, and at the same time, full of joy for her.

Cecily Putnam opened her eyes widely, and Simone said, "It does change, you see. But it's in the family, after all."

The old woman sat upright quickly. "That wicked child!" she exclaimed. "To come and frighten us like that. She ought to be spanked." She got up with great strength and rushed out to the garden.

"Nina!" she called imperiously. The child picked up one of the small stones from the pie plate now full of spring water, and came to her great-grandmother.

"I'll make something for you, Grandy," she said seriously. She put the stone in the palm of her hand, and breathed on it, and then held out her hand and offered the diamond.

"It's lovely. Thank you," the old woman said with dignity, and put her hand on the child's head. "Let's go for a walk and I'll show you how to grow rose-apples. That's more becoming to a young lady."

"You slept on the step."

"Ah! I'm old and I like to take little naps," Cecily answered.

Simone saw them disappear among the applerose trees side by side. She

was still trembling, but gradually, as she passed her hand back and forth, and the dust followed, moving in a sparkling river toward the trash basket, Simone stopped trembling and began to smile with the natural pride of a Putnam woman.

THE END

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WHERE THERE'S HOPE

By Jerome Bixby

The women had made up their minds, and nothing—repeat, nothing—could change them. But something had to give....

"If you called me here to tell me to have a child," Mary Pornsen said, "you can just forget about it. We girls have made up our minds."

Hugh Farrel, Chief Medical Officer of the Exodus VII, sighed and leaned back in his chair. He looked at Mary's husband. "And you, Ralph," he said. "How do you feel?"

Ralph Pornsen looked at Mary uncomfortably, started to speak and then hesitated.

Hugh Farrel sighed again and closed his eyes. It was that way with all the boys. The wives had the whip hand. If the husbands put up an argument, they'd simply get turned down flat: no sex at all, children or otherwise. The threat, Farrel thought wryly, made the boys softer than watered putty. His own wife, Alice, was one of the ringleaders of the "no babies" movement, and since he had openly declared warfare on the idea, she wouldn't even let him kiss her good-night. (For fear of losing her determination, Farrel liked to think.)

He opened his eyes again to look past the Pornsens, out of the curving port of his office-lab in the Exodus VII's flank, at the scene outside the ship.

At the edge of the clearing he could see Danny Stern and his crew, tiny beneath the cavernous sunbeam-shot overhang of giant leaves. Danny was standing up at the controls of the 'dozer, waving his arms. His crew was struggling to get a log set so he could shove it into place with the 'dozer. They were repairing a break in the barricade—the place where one of New Earth's giant saurians had come stamping and whistling through last night to kill three colonists before it could be blasted out of existence.

It was difficult. Damned difficult. A brand-new world here, all ready to receive the refugees from dying Earth. Or rather, all ready to be made ready, which was the task ahead of the Exodus VII's personnel.

An Earth-like world. Green, warm, fertile—and crawling, leaping, hooting and snarling with ferocious beasts of every variety. Farrel could certainly see the women's point in banding together and refusing to produce children. Something inside a woman keeps her from wanting to bring life into peril—at least, when the peril seems temporary, and security is both remembered and anticipated.

Pornsen said, "I guess I feel just about like Mary does. I—I don't see any reason for having a kid until we get this place ironed out and safe to live in."

"That's going to take time, Ralph." Farrel clasped his hands in front of him and delivered the speech he had delivered so often in the past few weeks. "Ten or twelve years before we really get set up here. We've got to build from the ground up, you know. We'll have to find and mine our metals. Build our machines to build shops to build more machines. There'll be resources that we won't find, and we'll have to learn what this planet has to offer in their stead. Colonizing New Earth isn't simply a matter of landing and throwing together a shining city. I only wish it were.

"Six weeks ago we landed. We haven't yet dared to venture more than a mile from this spot. We've cut down trees and built the barricade and our houses. After protecting ourselves we have to eat. We've planted gardens. We've produced test-tube calves and piglets. The calves are doing fine, but the piglets are dying one by one. We've got to find out why.

"It's going to be a long, long time before we have even a minimum of security, much less luxury.

Longer than you think.... So much longer that waiting until the security arrives before having children is out of the question. There are critters out there—" he nodded toward the port and the busy clearing beyond—"that we haven't been able to kill. We've thrown everything we have at them, and they come back for more. We'll have to find out what will kill them—how they differ from those we are able to kill. We are six hundred people and a spaceship, Ralph. We have techniques. That's all. Everything else we've got to dig up out of this planet. We'll need people, Mary; we'll need the children. We're counting on them. They're vital to the plans we've made."

Mary Pornsen said, "Damn the plans. I won't have one. Not now. You've just done a nice job of describing all my reasons. And all the other girls feel the same way."

She looked out the window at the 'dozer and crew. Danny Stern was still waving his arms; the log was almost in place. "George and May Wright were killed last night. So was Farelli. If George and May had had a child, the monster would have trampled it too—it went right through their cabin like cardboard. It isn't fair to bring a baby into—"

Farrel said, "Fair, Mary? Maybe it isn't fair not to have one. Not to bring it into being and give it a chance. Life's always a gamble—"

"It doesn't exist," Mary said. She smiled. "Don't try circumlocution on me, Doc. I'm not religious. I don't believe that spermatozoa and an ovum, if not allowed to cuddle up together, add up to murder."

"That isn't what I meant—"

"You were getting around to it—which means you've run out of good arguments."

"No. I've a few left." Farrel looked at the two stubborn faces: Mary's, pleasant and pretty, but set as steel; Ralph's, uncomfortable, thoughtful, but mirroring his definite willingness to follow his wife's lead.

Farrel cleared his throat. "You know how important it is that this colony be established? You know that, don't you? In twenty years or so the ships will start arriving. Hundreds of them. Because we sent a message back to Earth saying we'd found a habitable planet. Thousands of people from Earth, coming here to the new world we're supposed to get busy and carve out for them. We were selected for that task—first of judging the right planet, then of working it over. Engineers, chemists, agronomists, all of us—we're the task force. We've got to do the job. We've got to test, plant, breed, re-balance, create. There'll be a lot of trial and error. We've got to work out a way of life, so the thousands who will follow can be introduced safely and painlessly into the—well, into the organism. And we'll need new blood for the jobs ahead. We'll need young people—"

Mary said, "A few years one way or the other won't matter much, Doc. Five or six years from now this place will be a lot safer. Then we women will start producing. But not now."

"It won't work that way," Farrel said. "We're none of us kids any longer. I'm fifty-five. Ralph, you're forty-three. I realize that I must be getting old to think of you as young. Mary, you're thirty-seven. We took a long time getting here. Fourteen years. We left an Earth that's dying of radioactive poisoning, and we all got a mild dose of that. The radiation we absorbed in space, little as it was, didn't help any. And that sun up there—" again he nodded at the port—"isn't any help either. Periodically it throws off some pretty damned funny stuff."

"Frankly, we're worried. We don't know whether or not we can have children. Or normal children. We've got to find out. If our genes have been bollixed up, we've got to find out why and how and get to work on it immediately. It may be unpleasant. It may be heart-breaking. But those who will come here in twenty years will have absorbed much more of Earth's radioactivity than we did, and an equal amount of the space stuff, and this sun will be waiting for them.... We'll have to know what we can do for them."

"I'm not a walking laboratory, Doc," Mary said.

"I'm afraid you are, Mary. All of you are."

Mary set her lips and stared out the port.

"It's got to be done, Mary."

She didn't answer.

"It's going to be done."

"Choose someone else," she said.

"That's what they all say."

She said, "I guess this is one thing you doctors and psychologists didn't figure on, Doc."

"Not at first," Farrel said. "But we've given it some thought."

MacGuire had installed the button convenient to Farrel's right hand, just below the level of the desktop. Farrel pressed it. Ralph and Mary Pornsen slumped in their chairs. The door opened, and Doctor John J. MacGuire and Ted Harris, the Exodus VII's chief psychologist, came in.

When it was over, and the after-play had been allowed to run its course, Farrel told the Pornsens to go into the next room and shower. They came back soon, looking refreshed. Farrel ordered them to get back into their clothes. Under the power of the hypnotic drug which their chairs had injected into them at the touch of the button, they did so. Then he told them to sit down in the chairs again.

MacGuire and Harris had gathered up their equipment, piling it on top of the operating table.

MacGuire smiled. "I'll bet that's the best-monitored, most hygienic sex act ever committed. I think I've about got the space radiations effect licked."

Farrel nodded. "If anything goes wrong, it certainly won't be our fault. But let's face it—the chances are a thousand to one that something will go wrong. We'll just have to wait. And work." He looked at the Pornsens. "They're very much in love, aren't they? And she was receptive to the suggestion—beneath it all, she was burning to have a child, just like the others."

MacGuire wheeled out the operating table, with its load of serums, pressure-hypos and jury-rigged thingamabobs which he was testing on alternate couples. Ted Harris stopped at the door a moment. He

said, "I think the suggestions I planted will turn the trick when they find out she's pregnant. They'll come through okay—won't even be too angry."

Farrel sighed. They'd been over it in detail several times, of course, but apparently Harris needed the reassurance as much as he did. He said: "Sure. Now scram so I can go back into my act."

Harris closed the door. Farrel sat down at his desk and studied the pair before him. They looked back contentedly, holding hands, their eyes dull.

Farrel said, "How do you feel?"

Ralph Pornsen said, "I feel fine."

Mary Pornsen said, "Oh, I feel wonderful!"

Deliberately Farrel pressed another button below his desk-top.

The dull eyes cleared instantly.

"Oh, you've given it some thought, Doc?" Mary said sweetly. "And what have you decided?"

"You'll see," Farrel said. "Eventually."

He rose. "That's all for now, kids. I'd like to see you again in one month—for a routine check-up."

Mary nodded and got up. "You'll still have to wait, Doc. Why not admit you're licked?"

Ralph got up too, and looked puzzled.

"Wow," he said. "I'm tired."

"Perhaps just coming here," Farrel said, "discharged some of the tension you've been carrying around."

The Pornsens left.

Farrel brought out some papers from his desk and studied them. Then, from the file drawer, he selected the record of Hugh and Alice Farrel. Alice would be at the perfect time of her menstrual cycle tomorrow....

Farrel flipped his communicator.

"MacGuire," he said. "Tomorrow it's me."

MacGuire chuckled. Farrel could have kicked him. He put his chin in his hands and stared out the port. Danny Stern had the log in place in the barricade. The bulldozer was moving on to a new task. His momentary doubt stilled, Farrel went back to work.

Twenty-one years later, when the ships from Earth began arriving, the log had been replaced by a stone monument erected to the memory of the Exodus VII, which had been cut apart for its valuable steel.

Around the monument was a park, and on three sides of the park was a shining town—not really large enough to be called a city—of plastic and stone, for New Earth had no iron ore, only zinc and a little copper. This was often cause for regret.

Still it was a pretty good world. The monster problem had been licked by high-voltage cannon. Now in their third generation since the landing, the monsters kept their distance. And things grew—things good to eat.

And even without steel, the graceful, smoothly-functioning town looked impressive—quite a thing to have been built by a handful of beings with two arms and two legs each.

It hadn't been, entirely. But nobody thought much about that any more. Even the newcomers got used to it. Things change.

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

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Let There Be Light

By Horace B. Fyfe

[Transcriber Note: This etext was produced from IF Worlds of Science Fiction November 1952. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

No matter what the future, one factor must always be reckoned with—the ingenuity of the human animal.

The two men attacked the thick tree trunk with a weary savagery. In the bright sunlight, glistening spatters of sweat flew from them as the old axes bit alternately into the wood.

Blackie stood nearby, on the gravel shoulder of the highway, rubbing his short beard as he considered the depth of the white notch. Turning his broad, tanned face to glance along the patched and cracked concrete to where squat Vito kept watch, he caught the latter's eye and beckoned.

"Okay, Sid—Mike. We'll take it a while."

The rhythm of the axe-strokes ceased. Red Mike swept the back of a forearm across the semi-shaven stubble that set him as something of a dandy. Wordlessly, big Sid ambled up the road to replace Vito.

"Pretty soon, now," boasted Mike, eyeing the cut with satisfaction. "Think it'll bring them?"

"Sure," replied Blackie, spitting on his hands and lifting one of the worn tools. "That's what they're for."

"Funny," mused Mike, "how some keep going an' others bust. These musta been workin' since I was a little kid—since before the last blitz."

"Aw, they don't hafta do much. 'Cept in winter when they come out to clear snow, all they do is put in a patch now an' then."

Mike stared moodily at the weathered surface of the highway and edged back to avoid the reflected heat.

"It beats me how they know a spot has cracked."

"I guess there's machines to run the machines," sighed Blackie. "I dunno; I was too young. Okay, Vito?"

The relieving pair fell to. Mike stepped out of range of the flying chips to sit at the edge of the soft grass which was attempting another invasion of the gravel shoulder. Propelled by the strength of Vito's powerful torso, a single chip spun through the air to his feet. He picked it up and held it to his nose. It had a good, clean smell.

When at length the tree crashed down across the road, Blackie led them to the ambush he had chosen that morning. It was fifty yards up the road toward the ruined city—off to the side where a clump of trees and bushes provided shade and concealment.

"Wish we brought something to eat," Vito said.

"Didn't know it would take so long to creep up on 'em this morning," said Blackie. "The women'll have somethin' when we get back."

"They better," said Mike.

He measured a slender branch with his eye. After a moment, he pulled out a hunting knife, worn thin by years of sharpening, and cut off a straight section of the branch. He began whittling.

"You damn' fool!" Sid objected. "You want the busted spot on the tree to show?"

"Aw, they ain't got the brains to notice."

"The hell they ain't! It stands out like one o' them old street signs. D'ya think they can tell, Blackie?"

"I dunno. Maybe." Blackie rose cautiously to peer over a bed of blackberry bushes. "Guess I'll skin up a tree an' see if anything's in sight."

He hitched up his pants, looking for an easy place to climb. His blue denims had been stoutly made, but weakened by many rips and patches, and he did not want to rip them on a snag. It was becoming difficult to find good, unrotted clothing in the old ruins.

Choosing a branch slightly over his head, he sprang for it, pulled, kicked against the trunk, and flowed up into the foliage with no apparent effort. The others waited below. Sid glanced up occasionally, Vito idly kicked at one of the clubs made from an old two-by-four.

The other lay beneath the piled jackets; but enough of the end protruded to show that they had been chopped from the same timber, gray-painted on one side, stained and gouged on the other where boards had once been nailed. A coil of rope lay beside the axes.

High in the upper branches, Blackie braced himself with negligent confidence and stared along the concrete ribbon.

From here, he thought, you'd almost think the place was still alive, instead of crumbling around our ears.

The windows of the distant houses were dark, unglassed holes, but the sunlight made the masonry clean and shining. To Blackie, the ragged tops of most of the buildings were as natural as the tattered look of the few people he knew. Beyond, toward the center of the city, was real evidence of his race's bygone might—a vast jumble of shattered stone and fused metal. Queer weeds and mosses infected the area, but it would be centuries before they could mask the desolation.

Better covered, were the heaps along the road, seemingly shoved just beyond the gravel shoulders—mouldering mounds which legend said were once machines to ride in along the pavement.

Something glinted at the bend of the highway. Blackie peered closer.

He swarmed down the tree from branch to branch, so lithely that the trio below hardly had the warning of the vibrating leaves before he dropped, cat-footed, among them.

"They're comin'!"

He shrugged quickly into his stained jacket, emulated in silent haste by the others. Vito rubbed his hands down the hairy chest left revealed by his open jacket and hefted one of the clubs. In his broad paws, it seemed light.

They were quiet, watching Sid peer out through narrowly parted brush of the undergrowth. Blackie fidgeted behind him. Finally, he reached out as if to pull the other aside, but at that moment Sid released the bushes and crouched.

The others, catching his warning glance, fell prone, peering through shrubbery and around tree trunks with savage eyes.

The distant squawk of a jay became suddenly very clear, as did the sighing of a faint breeze through the leaves overhead. Then a new, clanking, humming sound intruded.

A procession of three vehicles rolled along the highway at an unvarying pace which took no account of patches or worn spots. They jounced in turn across a patch laid over a previous, unsuccessful patch, and halted before the felled tree. Two were bulldozers; the third was a light truck with compartments for tools. No human figures were visible.

A moment later, the working force appeared—a column of eight robots. These deployed as they reached the obstacle, and explored like colossal ants along its length.

"What're they after?" asked Mike, whispering although he lay fifty yards away.

"They're lookin' over the job for whatever sends them out," Blackie whispered back. "See those little lights stickin' out the tops o' their heads? I heard tell, once, that's how they're run."

Some of the robots took saws from the truck and began to cut through the tree trunk. Others produced cables and huge hooks to attach the obstacle to the bulldozers.

"Look at 'em go!" sighed Sid, hunching his stiff shoulders jealously. "Took us hours, an' they're half done already."

They watched as the robots precisely severed the part of the tree that blocked the highway, going not one inch beyond the gravel shoulder, and helped the bulldozers to tug it aside. On the opposite side of the concrete, the shoulder tapered off into a six-foot drop. The log was jockeyed around parallel to this ditch and rolled into it, amid a thrashing of branches and a spurting of small pebbles.

"Glad we're on the high side," whispered Mike. "That thing 'ud squash a guy's guts right out!"

"Keep listenin' to me," Blackie said, "an' you'll keep on bein' in the right place at the right time."

Mike raised his eyebrows at Vito, who thrust out his lower lip and nodded sagely. Sid grinned, but no one contradicted the boast.

"They're linin' up," Blackie warned tensely. "You guys ready? Where's that rope?"

Someone thrust it into his hands. Still squinting at the scene on the highway, he fumbled for the ends and held one out to Mike. The others gripped their clubs.

"Now, remember!" ordered Blackie. "Me an' Mike will trip up the last one in line. You two get in there quick an' wallop him over the head—but good!"

"Don't go away while we're doin' it," said big Sid. "They won't chase ya, but they look out fer themselves. I don't wanna get tossed twenty feet again!"

The eyes of the others flicked toward the jagged white scar running down behind Sid's right ear and under the collar of his jacket. Then they swung back to the road.

"Good!" breathed Blackie. "The rollin' stuff's goin' first."

The truck and bulldozers set out toward the city, with the column of robots marching a fair distance behind. The latter approached the ambush—drew abreast—began to pass.

Blackie raised himself to a crouch with just the tips of his fingers steadying him.

As the last robot plodded by, he surged out of the brush, joined to Red Mike by their grips on the twenty feet of rope. They ran up behind the marching machine, trailed by the others.

In his right hand, Blackie twirled the part of the rope hanging between him and Mike. On the second swing, he got it over the head of the robot. He saw Mike brace himself.

The robot staggered. It pivoted clumsily to its left, groping vaguely for the hindrance. Mike and Blackie tugged again, and the machine wound up facing them in its efforts to maintain balance. Its companions marched steadily along the road.

"Switch ends!" barked Blackie.

Alert, Mike tossed him the other end of the rope and caught Blackie's. They ran past the robot on either side, looping it in. Blackie kept going until he was above the ditch. He wound a turn of rope about his forearm and plunged down the bank.

With skill of long practice, they brought the robot down.

A shower of gravel spattered after him as Mike jammed his heels into the shoulder of the highway to anchor the other end. Then he heard the booming sound of the robot's fall.

Blackie clawed his way up the bank. Vito and Sid were smashing furiously at the floundering machine. Mike danced about the melee with bared teeth, charging in once as if to leap upon the quarry with both feet. Frustrated by the peril of the whirling two-by-fours, he swept up handfuls of gravel to hurl.

Blackie turned to run for one of the axes. Just then, Sid struck home to the head of the robot.

Sparks spat out amid a tinkle of glass. The machine ceased all motion.

"All right!" panted Blackie. "All right! That's enough!"

They stepped back, snarls fading. A handful of gravel trickled through Mike's fingers and pattered loudly on the concrete. Gradually, the men began to straighten up, seeing the robot as an inert heap of metal rather than as a weird beast in its death throes.

"We better load up an' get," said Blackie. "We wanna be over on the trail if they send somethin' up the road to look for this."

Vito dragged the robot off the highway by the head, and they began the task of lashing it to the two-by-fours.

It was about two hours later when they plodded around a street corner among the ruins and stopped before a fairly intact building. By that time, they had picked up an escort of dirty, half-clad children who ran ahead to spread the news.

Two other men and a handful of women gathered around with eager exclamations. The hunters dropped their catch.

"Better get to work on him," said Blackie, glancing at the sky. "Be dark soon."

The men who had remained as guards ran inside the entrance of polished granite and brought out tools: hammers, crowbars, hatchets. Behind them hurried women with basins and large cans. The original four, weary from the weight of the robot despite frequent pauses on the trail, stepped back.

"Where first, Blackie?" asked one of the men, waiting for the women to untangle the rope and timbers.

"Try all the joints. After that, we'll crack him open down the middle for the main supply tank."

He watched the metal give way under the blows. As the robot was dismembered, the fluid that had lubricated the complex mechanism flowed from its wounds and was poured by the women into a five-gallon can.

"Bring a cupful, Judy," Blackie told his woman, a wiry blond girl. "I wanna see if it's as good as the last."

He lit a stick at the fire as they crossed the littered, once-ornate lobby, and she followed him down a dim hall. He pulled aside the skins that covered their doorway, then stumbled his way to the table. The window was still uncovered against the night chill, but it looked out on a courtyard shadowed by towering walls. To eyes adjusted to the sunny street, the room was dark.

Judy poured the oil into the makeshift lamp, waited for the rag wick to soak, and held it out to Blackie. He lit the wick from his stick.

"It burns real good, Blackie," the girl said, wrinkling her nose against the first oily smoke. "Gee, you're smart to catch one the first day out."

"Tell them other dames to watch how they use it!" he warned. "This oughta last a month or more when we get him all emptied."

He blew out the dying flame on the stick and dropped the charred wood thoughtfully to the floor.

"Naw, I ain't so smart," he admitted, "or I'd figure a way to make one of them work the garden for us. Maybe someday—but this kind won't do nothin' but fix that goddam road, an' what good's that to anybody?"

His woman moved the burning lamp carefully to the center of the table.

"Anyway, it's gonna be better'n last winter," she said. "We'll have lights now."

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The Stowaway
By Alvin Heiner

He stole a ride to the Moon in search of glory, but found a far different destiny.

His eyes were a little feverish—as they had been of late—and his voice held a continuous intensity—as though he were imparting a secret. "I've got to get on that ship! I've got to, I tell you! And I'm going to make it!"

Different members of the group regarded him variously, some with amusement, some with contempt, others with frank curiosity.

"You're plain nuts, Joe. What do you want to go to the Moon for?"

"Sure, why you wanna go? What they got on the Moon we ain't got right here?"

There was general laughter from the dozen or so who sat eating their lunch in the shade of Building B. They all thought that was a pretty good one. Good enough to repeat. "Sure, what they got on the Moon we ain't got here?"

But Joe Spain wasn't in the mood for jokes. He burned with even greater conviction and stood up as though to harangue the workers. "You wanta know why I got to go to the Moon? Why I've got to get on that ship? Then I'll tell you. It's 'cause I'm a little guy—that's why! Joe Spain—working stiff—one of the great inarticulate masses."

More laughter. "Where'd you get those big words, Joey? Out of a book? Come on—talk English!"

Joe Spain pointed to the huge, tubelike Building A, off across the desert; the building you had to have two different passes and a written permit to enter. The mystery building where even newspaper reporters were barred. "It's only the big shots they let in there ain't it? Only them that's got a drag or went to college or something. Us little guys they tell go to blow—ain't that right?"

"Who the hell cares? Maybe it's a damn good place to stay away from. Maybe it'll explode or something. Who wants to die and collect his insurance?"

"I got to get on that ship when it blasts off because they can't push the masses around! We got a right to be represented even if we got to sneak in!"

"Me—I'll stay on the ground."

"And besides there's the glory! You guys are too stupid to see that but it's there. The glory of being on the first rocket ship to the Moon. The name of Joe Spain written down in the history books and said over by people and school kids for thousands of years! Immortality! That's the word!"

"Well, just forget about it, Joe, 'cause you ain't going."

Joe Spain's eyes burned brighter. "Joe Spain, coming down the ramp with the big shots when it's all over. News cameras snapping! People asking for interviews!"

"But you ain't going 'cause—"

Joe shouted the man down. "And another thing. Us little people are entitled to a representative aboard that ship. We got a right to know what's going on. How come there's nothing about it in the papers? Only the big shots knowing about it and whispering among themselves? It's because they're trying to snag it all and freeze us out!"

"You're crazy. It's for security reasons. It's all hush-hush so it won't leak out like the atom bomb did. The big boys are being smart this time."

"And you ain't getting on," the interrupted man repeated doggedly, "because there ain't a way in God's world to get on. With triple security all around the building, just tell me a way to get in. Just tell me one."

"I'm going to get on that ship," Joe Spain said. Then he clammed up suddenly. Joe Spain wasn't stupid. He was a talker, but he knew when to stop sounding off.

The men went back to work shifting the big aluminum barrels from trucks into Building B. Carrying the wooden crates and the paper-wrapped parcels up the ramps and to the side of the building facing the big secret structure labeled A. They worked until five o'clock. Then they filed out and got into the waiting trucks and were hauled back to town; the boom town that had mushroomed up in the desert overnight and would die with the same swiftness when the project was completed.

Joe went straight to his rooming house, washed up, put on his good clothes, and found a stool in a nearby restaurant. He ate a leisurely supper, glancing now and again at the clock. When the clock read eight, he went out into the neon-stained darkness and walked three blocks to the Black Cat, one of the three night clubs the desert town boasted. He went to the bar and ordered a drink. He downed it slowly, carefully, after the manner of a man who wanted to stay sober.

A half-hour passed before a thin, nervous individual elbowed to the bar and stood beside him. Joe said. "Hello, Nick. You been thinking it over?"

"I need a drink."

"Sure, Nick. Then we'll go some place and talk." But Nick got rid of five drinks while Joe protected his own glass from the barkeep. After a while, Joe said, "I'm willing to up the price, Nick. Two thousand—cash. All I got."

"Le's get out o' here," Nick mumbled.

They walked out of the town and into the desert, Nick stumbling now and again, to be supported by the tense, sober Joe. "Two thousand, Nick. You need the dough."

"Sure. Need the dough. But it wouldn't work. Couldn't get you into one o' them barrels."

"You wouldn't have to. All I ask is that you come along in the morning and seal me up in one. All you'll have to do is lock on the lid."

"How you know the barrels are going on the ship?"

"Never mind about that. I just know. I paid to find out."

"Okay—suppose you do get on the ship in a barrel. Maybe it'll be stored in a hold somewhere. Maybe they wouldn't open it very soon. You'd die."

"I got a way to get out. One of them special torches. The little ones. Aluminum isn't very strong. I can cut it like butter."

"It'd be hot. You'd burn yourself."

"Let me worry about that," Joe said fiercely. "You want the two grand or not?"

Nick wanted the two thousand and he was against the wall for excuses. Then he had a happy thought. "Barrels is air-tight. You'd smother. Thing's im—impracac'l. We'll forget it."

"I won't smother. I'm taking my own oxygen. Enough to last me clear to the Moon if it has to. Come on. Break down!"

"Okay. For two grand. Got to have the dough now though."

His heart singing, Joe Spain counted out two thousand in cash. When he'd finished he had exactly nine dollars left. He was a pauper. But the happiest pauper who ever bought with his whole fortune the thing he craved most.

"You won't double-cross me now, will you? If you've got any ideas like that—"

"I'll do like we said. Nick Sparks never went back on his word—never. But how you going to stay hid when it's time to leave work?"

"Leave that to me. It'll be easy. They don't check Building B too close. No double check 'cause it's over a mile from Building A—outside the safety perimeter. I'll stay in tomorrow night and I'll put a little chalk-mark on the barrel I'm in—right near the top rim. First thing you do when you come to work the next morning is seal it and line it up with the filled ones."

"Okay, but I gotta go home now. I got a head. I gotta get some sleep."

"What's in the duffel bag?"

"Clean overalls—towel." Joe pulled the zipper down halfway. The guard fingered the blue denim but didn't dig deeper to find the towel. He checked Joe's badge number, made a note on his pad, and motioned to the next worker. Joe let tight breath slowly out of his lungs as he walked toward Building B. Getting past the guard was a load off his mind. He'd expected to get by, but it was one of the calculated risks that could have stopped him cold.

Once inside the building, he put the bag into his locker and went to work. He labored briskly and carried more than his share of the load. But now and again he stopped to look over at the outline of Building A, limned hard against hot blazing sky. And each time it was with a sense of heady exhilaration that he thought of his destiny—his hard-earned, dearly bought destiny. To be among that select group who would first set foot upon the surface of the Moon!

He had no worries about not being allowed to do so. Once he showed himself—with the ship far out in space—they'd have to accept him. Not graciously of course, but they'd have to admire his courage and tenacity. They could not, in all humanity, deny him a share of the victory.

The day wore on and as quitting time approached, he became more tense—more alert. Five minutes before the whistle, he faded back into the building and hurried to the lavatory. He went into the booth furthest from the entrance and locked the door. Now there was nothing to do but wait. Another of the calculated risks.

The whistle blew. Almost immediately, the sound of footsteps broke the silence and the lavatory was filled with hurrying men. Their stay in the room was short, however, as Joe had known it would be. Men leaving for home do not dawdle on the premises.

The lavatory was empty again. A period of silence while Joe raised his feet from the floor and braced them on the toilet seat. The entrance door opened. A guard making the departure checkup.

Joe held his breath. If the guard came down the line and tried the door, he was finished. But Joe had banked upon human nature. The guard stopped. For a long moment there was no sound and Joe knew the man was bending over to run his eyes down the line of toilets close to the floor. In this manner he could see the floor of every booth. The guard straightened, turned, walked out. The door closed. Silence. Joe's heart swelled with gratitude. He grinned, looking forward with joy to the long night ahead.

He found a spot over behind the barrels where the night watchman would have to climb over a lot of equipment in order to find him. He made himself comfortable, practically certain the guard would not do this. He stretched out on the hard floor and recorded the passing of the hours by the number of times the watchman went through.

And he was surprised at how fast the time passed. Finally, checking his count carefully, he left his hiding place and tiptoed to the line of lockers. He took the oxygen equipment from the duffel bag after which he hid the bag and the clothing therein behind a wall flange in a far corner. Then he climbed into the barrel at the front end of the packing line. He checked the barrel with a small X, and jockeyed the lid into place.

Time passed. Nothing happened. He wondered, if he'd missed on the time element. The men should certainly have come to work now. More than once he was tempted to push the barrel lid aside and check the situation. When footsteps sounded, close by, and the lid snapped firmly into place, he was glad he hadn't done so. Good old Nick! When he got back from the Moon, he'd see to it that Nick got credit for his courageous act.

Soon the barrel began to move. Joe felt it rise into the air and settle with a thump. Then the motor of a truck roared and Joe knew where he was going. Straight toward Building A and the Moon rocket. There was more movement until finally the barrel was set down for what appeared to be the last time. Joe put the nose-piece of the oxygen tube into place and visualized himself safe and snug in a storage room of the rocket.

He closed his eyes and went peacefully to sleep.

He slept a long time, to be awakened by a crushing—a wrenching—that all but drove his head down

into his spine. The pain brought him sharply alert. He knew instantly what had happened.

Blast-off.

He braced himself against the sides of the barrel, and gritted his teeth.

Soon it was better. Then no pressure at all. Only the fierce happiness on his heart. He'd set a course and won through! He was on the way to the Moon!

Joe let plenty of time elapse. He knew it was well over an hour later when he unlimbered the torch to cut an escape-hole in the barrel. This, he knew, would be tricky. He could easily burn himself. The heat would be intense.

But it wasn't too bad. The aluminum cut quickly, and in a matter of minutes he was standing beside his barrel. As he'd suspected, it was a storage hold. The pitch-darkness did not bother him. He'd come prepared with a small pencil flash that threw an adequate beam.

He found the door, opened it and went out into a long passageway....

Now he'd covered the length and breadth of the ship. He'd found a lot of rooms—all in pitch-darkness. No observation ports.

And no living thing.

He stood frozen in one of the rooms while the beam of his flash picked out a code stenciled on a steel plate over some piece of machinery. X59-306MY—Experimental—Explosion Rocket—Moon.

The flash dropped from Joe Spain's fingers. He stood in the pitch-darkness while the jets vibrated through the rocket.

But there was no fear in him. Only the great pain of futility. Only his tears, and his whispered words:

"They'll never know. Nobody won't ever know!"

THE END

Transcriber's Note:

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2_B_R_0_2_B

By

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

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by KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

*Got a problem? Just pick up the phone.
It solved them all--and all the same way!*

Everything was perfectly swell.

There were no prisons, no slums, no insane asylums, no cripples, no poverty, no wars.

All diseases were conquered. So was old age.

Death, barring accidents, was an adventure for volunteers.

The population of the United States was stabilized at forty-million souls.

One bright morning in the Chicago Lying-in Hospital, a man named Edward K. Wehling, Jr., waited for his wife to give birth. He was the only man waiting. Not many people were born a day any more.

Wehling was fifty-six, a mere stripling in a population whose average age was one hundred and twenty-nine.

X-rays had revealed that his wife was going to have triplets. The children would be his first.

Young Wehling was hunched in his chair, his head in his hand. He was so rumped, so still and colorless as to be virtually invisible. His camouflage was perfect, since the waiting room had a disorderly and demoralized air, too. Chairs and ashtrays had been moved away from the walls. The floor was paved with spattered dropcloths.

The room was being redecorated. It was being redecorated as a memorial to a man who had volunteered to die.

A sardonic old man, about two hundred years old, sat on a stepladder, painting a mural he did not like. Back in the days when people aged visibly, his age would have been guessed at thirty-five or so. Aging had touched him that much before the cure for aging was found.

The mural he was working on depicted a very neat garden. Men and women in white, doctors and nurses, turned the soil, planted seedlings, sprayed bugs, spread fertilizer.

Men and women in purple uniforms pulled up weeds, cut down plants that were old and sickly, raked leaves, carried refuse to trash-burners.

Never, never, never--not even in medieval Holland nor old Japan--had a garden been more formal, been better tended. Every plant had all the loam, light, water, air and nourishment it could use.

A hospital orderly came down the corridor, singing under his breath a popular song:

If you don't like my kisses, honey,
Here's what I will do:
I'll go see a girl in purple,
Kiss this sad world toodle-oo.
If you don't want my lovin',
Why should I take up all this space?
I'll get off this old planet,
Let some sweet baby have my place.

The orderly looked in at the mural and the muralist. "Looks so real," he said, "I can practically imagine I'm standing in the middle of it."

"What makes you think you're not in it?" said the painter. He gave a satiric smile. "It's called 'The Happy Garden of Life,' you know."

"That's good of Dr. Hitz," said the orderly.

* * * * *

He was referring to one of the male figures in white, whose head was a portrait of Dr. Benjamin Hitz, the hospital's Chief Obstetrician. Hitz was a blindingly handsome man.

"Lot of faces still to fill in," said the orderly. He meant that the faces of many of the figures in the mural were still blank. All blanks were to be filled with portraits of important people on either the hospital staff or from the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of

Termination.

"Must be nice to be able to make pictures that look like something," said the orderly.

The painter's face curdled with scorn. "You think I'm proud of this daub?" he said. "You think this is my idea of what life really looks like?"

"What's your idea of what life looks like?" said the orderly.

The painter gestured at a foul dropcloth. "There's a good picture of it," he said. "Frame that, and you'll have a picture a damn sight more honest than this one."

"You're a gloomy old duck, aren't you?" said the orderly.

"Is that a crime?" said the painter.

The orderly shrugged. "If you don't like it here, Grandpa--" he said, and he finished the thought with the trick telephone number that people who didn't want to live any more were supposed to call. The zero in the telephone number he pronounced "naught."

The number was: "2 B R 0 2 B."

It was the telephone number of an institution whose fanciful sobriquets included: "Automat," "Birdland," "Cannery," "Catbox," "De-louser," "Easy-go," "Good-by, Mother," "Happy Hooligan," "Kiss-me-quick," "Lucky Pierre," "Sheepdip," "Waring Blendor," "Weep-no-more" and "Why Worry?"

"To be or not to be" was the telephone number of the municipal gas chambers of the Federal Bureau of Termination.

* * * * *

The painter thumbed his nose at the orderly. "When I decide it's time to go," he said, "it won't be at the Sheepdip."

"A do-it-yourselfer, eh?" said the orderly. "Messy business, Grandpa. Why don't you have a little consideration for the people who have to clean up after you?"

The painter expressed with an obscenity his lack of concern for the tribulations of his survivors. "The world could do with a good deal more mess, if you ask me," he said.

The orderly laughed and moved on.

Wehling, the waiting father, mumbled something without raising his head. And then he fell silent again.

A coarse, formidable woman strode into the waiting room on spike heels. Her shoes, stockings, trench coat, bag and overseas cap were all purple, the purple the painter called "the color of grapes on Judgment Day."

The medallion on her purple musette bag was the seal of the Service Division of the Federal Bureau of Termination, an eagle perched on a turnstile.

The woman had a lot of facial hair--an unmistakable mustache, in fact. A curious thing about gas-chamber hostesses was that, no matter how lovely and feminine they were when recruited, they all sprouted mustaches within five years or so.

"Is this where I'm supposed to come?" she said to the painter.

"A lot would depend on what your business was," he said. "You aren't about to have a baby, are you?"

"They told me I was supposed to pose for some picture," she said. "My name's Leora Duncan." She waited.

"And you dunk people," he said.

"What?" she said.

"Skip it," he said.

"That sure is a beautiful picture," she said. "Looks just like heaven or something."

"Or something," said the painter. He took a list of names from his smock pocket. "Duncan, Duncan, Duncan," he said, scanning the list. "Yes--here you are. You're entitled to be immortalized. See any faceless body here you'd like me to stick your head on? We've got a few choice ones left."

She studied the mural bleakly. "Gee," she said, "they're all the same to me. I don't know anything about art."

"A body's a body, eh?" he said, "All righty. As a master of fine art, I recommend this body here." He indicated a faceless figure of a woman who was carrying dried stalks to a trash-burner.

"Well," said Leora Duncan, "that's more the disposal people, isn't it? I mean, I'm in service. I don't do any disposing."

The painter clapped his hands in mock delight. "You say you don't know

anything about art, and then you prove in the next breath that you know more about it than I do! Of course the sheave-carrier is wrong for a hostess! A snipper, a pruner--that's more your line." He pointed to a figure in purple who was sawing a dead branch from an apple tree. "How about her?" he said. "You like her at all?"

"Gosh--" she said, and she blushed and became humble--"that--that puts me right next to Dr. Hitz."

"That upsets you?" he said.

"Good gravy, no!" she said. "It's--it's just such an honor."

"Ah, You admire him, eh?" he said.

"Who doesn't admire him?" she said, worshiping the portrait of Hitz. It was the portrait of a tanned, white-haired, omnipotent Zeus, two hundred and forty years old. "Who doesn't admire him?" she said again. "He was responsible for setting up the very first gas chamber in Chicago."

"Nothing would please me more," said the painter, "than to put you next to him for all time. Sawing off a limb--that strikes you as appropriate?"

"That is kind of like what I do," she said. She was demure about what she did. What she did was make people comfortable while she killed them.

* * * * *

And, while Leora Duncan was posing for her portrait, into the waitingroom bounded Dr. Hitz himself. He was seven feet tall, and he boomed with importance, accomplishments, and the joy of living.

"Well, Miss Duncan! Miss Duncan!" he said, and he made a joke. "What are you doing here?" he said. "This isn't where the people leave. This is where they come in!"

"We're going to be in the same picture together," she said shyly.

"Good!" said Dr. Hitz heartily. "And, say, isn't that some picture?"

"I sure am honored to be in it with you," she said.

"Let me tell you," he said, "I'm honored to be in it with you. Without women like you, this wonderful world we've got wouldn't be possible."

He saluted her and moved toward the door that led to the delivery rooms. "Guess what was just born," he said.

"I can't," she said.

"Triplets!" he said.

"Triplets!" she said. She was exclaiming over the legal implications of triplets.

The law said that no newborn child could survive unless the parents of the child could find someone who would volunteer to die. Triplets, if they were all to live, called for three volunteers.

"Do the parents have three volunteers?" said Leora Duncan.

"Last I heard," said Dr. Hitz, "they had one, and were trying to scrape another two up."

"I don't think they made it," she said. "Nobody made three appointments with us. Nothing but singles going through today, unless somebody called in after I left. What's the name?"

"Wehling," said the waiting father, sitting up, red-eyed and frowzy. "Edward K. Wehling, Jr., is the name of the happy father-to-be."

He raised his right hand, looked at a spot on the wall, gave a hoarsely wretched chuckle. "Present," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Wehling," said Dr. Hitz, "I didn't see you."

"The invisible man," said Wehling.

"They just phoned me that your triplets have been born," said Dr. Hitz. "They're all fine, and so is the mother. I'm on my way in to see them now."

"Hooray," said Wehling emptily.

"You don't sound very happy," said Dr. Hitz.

"What man in my shoes wouldn't be happy?" said Wehling. He gestured with his hands to symbolize care-free simplicity. "All I have to do is pick out which one of the triplets is going to live, then deliver my maternal grandfather to the Happy Hooligan, and come back here with a receipt."

* * * * *

Dr. Hitz became rather severe with Wehling, towered over him. "You don't believe in population control, Mr. Wehling?" he said.

"I think it's perfectly keen," said Wehling tautly.

"Would you like to go back to the good old days, when the population of the Earth was twenty billion--about to become forty billion, then eighty billion, then one hundred and sixty billion? Do you know what a drupelet is, Mr. Wehling?" said Hitz.

"Nope," said Wehling sulkily.

"A drupelet, Mr. Wehling, is one of the little knobs, one of the little pulpy grains of a blackberry," said Dr. Hitz. "Without population control, human beings would now be packed on this surface of this old planet like drupelets on a blackberry! Think of it!"

Wehling continued to stare at the same spot on the wall.

"In the year 2000," said Dr. Hitz, "before scientists stepped in and laid down the law, there wasn't even enough drinking water to go around, and nothing to eat but sea-weed--and still people insisted on their right to reproduce like jackrabbits. And their right, if possible, to live forever."

"I want those kids," said Wehling quietly. "I want all three of them."

"Of course you do," said Dr. Hitz. "That's only human."

"I don't want my grandfather to die, either," said Wehling.

"Nobody's really happy about taking a close relative to the Catbox," said Dr. Hitz gently, sympathetically.

"I wish people wouldn't call it that," said Leora Duncan.

"What?" said Dr. Hitz.

"I wish people wouldn't call it 'the Catbox,' and things like that," she said. "It gives people the wrong impression."

"You're absolutely right," said Dr. Hitz. "Forgive me." He corrected himself, gave the municipal gas chambers their official title, a title no one ever used in conversation. "I should have said, 'Ethical Suicide Studios,'" he said.

"That sounds so much better," said Leora Duncan.

"This child of yours--whichever one you decide to keep, Mr. Wehling," said Dr. Hitz. "He or she is going to live on a happy, roomy, clean, rich planet, thanks to population control. In a garden like that mural there." He shook his head. "Two centuries ago, when I was a young man, it was a hell that nobody thought could last another twenty years. Now

centuries of peace and plenty stretch before us as far as the imagination cares to travel."

He smiled luminously.

The smile faded as he saw that Wehling had just drawn a revolver.

Wehling shot Dr. Hitz dead. "There's room for one--a great big one," he said.

And then he shot Leora Duncan. "It's only death," he said to her as she fell. "There! Room for two."

And then he shot himself, making room for all three of his children.

Nobody came running. Nobody, seemingly, heard the shots.

The painter sat on the top of his stepladder, looking down reflectively on the sorry scene.

* * * * *

The painter pondered the mournful puzzle of life demanding to be born and, once born, demanding to be fruitful ... to multiply and to live as long as possible--to do all that on a very small planet that would have to last forever.

All the answers that the painter could think of were grim. Even grimmer, surely, than a Catbox, a Happy Hooligan, an Easy Go. He thought of war. He thought of plague. He thought of starvation.

He knew that he would never paint again. He let his paintbrush fall to the dropcloths below. And then he decided he had had about enough of life in the Happy Garden of Life, too, and he came slowly down from the ladder.

He took Wehling's pistol, really intending to shoot himself.

But he didn't have the nerve.

And then he saw the telephone booth in the corner of the room. He went to it, dialed the well-remembered number: "2 B R 0 2 B."

"Federal Bureau of Termination," said the very warm voice of a hostess.

"How soon could I get an appointment?" he asked, speaking very carefully.

"We could probably fit you in late this afternoon, sir," she said. "It

might even be earlier, if we get a cancellation."

"All right," said the painter, "fit me in, if you please." And he gave her his name, spelling it out.

"Thank you, sir," said the hostess. "Your city thanks you; your country thanks you; your planet thanks you. But the deepest thanks of all is from future generations."

END

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Time Enough At Last

By Lynn Venable

The atomic bomb meant, to most people, the end.

To Henry Bemis it meant something far different—a thing to appreciate and enjoy.

For a long time, Henry Bemis had had an ambition. To read a book. Not just the title or the preface, or a page somewhere in the middle. He wanted to read the whole thing, all the way through from beginning to end. A simple ambition perhaps, but in the cluttered life of Henry Bemis, an impossibility.

Henry had no time of his own. There was his wife, Agnes who owned that part of it that his employer, Mr. Carsville, did not buy. Henry was allowed enough to get to and from work—that in itself being quite a concession on Agnes' part.

Also, nature had conspired against Henry by handing him with a pair of hopelessly myopic eyes. Poor Henry literally couldn't see his hand in front of his face. For a while, when he was very young, his parents had thought him an idiot. When they realized it was his eyes, they got glasses for him. He was never quite able to catch up. There was never enough time. It looked as though Henry's ambition would never be realized. Then something happened which changed all that.

Henry was down in the vault of the Eastside Bank & Trust when it happened. He had stolen a few moments from the duties of his teller's cage to try to read a few pages of the magazine he had bought that morning. He'd made an excuse to Mr. Carsville about needing bills in large denominations for a certain customer, and then, safe inside the dim recesses of the vault he had pulled from inside his coat the pocket size magazine.

He had just started a picture article cheerfully entitled "The New Weapons and What They'll Do To

YOU", when all the noise in the world crashed in upon his ear-drums. It seemed to be inside of him and outside of him all at once. Then the concrete floor was rising up at him and the ceiling came slanting down toward him, and for a fleeting second Henry thought of a story he had started to read once called "The Pit and The Pendulum". He regretted in that insane moment that he had never had time to finish that story to see how it came out. Then all was darkness and quiet and unconsciousness.

When Henry came to, he knew that something was desperately wrong with the Eastside Bank & Trust. The heavy steel door of the vault was buckled and twisted and the floor tilted up at a dizzy angle, while the ceiling dipped crazily toward it. Henry gingerly got to his feet, moving arms and legs experimentally. Assured that nothing was broken, he tenderly raised a hand to his eyes. His precious glasses were intact, thank God! He would never have been able to find his way out of the shattered vault without them.

He made a mental note to write Dr. Torrance to have a spare pair made and mailed to him. Blasted nuisance not having his prescription on file locally, but Henry trusted no-one but Dr. Torrance to grind those thick lenses into his own complicated prescription. Henry removed the heavy glasses from his face. Instantly the room dissolved into a neutral blur. Henry saw a pink splash that he knew was his hand, and a white blob come up to meet the pink as he withdrew his pocket handkerchief and carefully dusted the lenses. As he replaced the glasses, they slipped down on the bridge of his nose a little. He had been meaning to have them tightened for some time.

He suddenly realized, without the realization actually entering his conscious thoughts, that something momentous had happened, something worse than the boiler blowing up, something worse than a gas main exploding, something worse than anything that had ever happened before. He felt that way because it was so quiet. There was no whine of sirens, no shouting, no running, just an ominous and all pervading silence.

Henry walked across the slanting floor. Slipping and stumbling on the uneven surface, he made his way to the elevator. The car lay crumpled at the foot of the shaft like a discarded accordian. There was something inside of it that Henry could not look at, something that had once been a person, or perhaps several people, it was impossible to tell now.

Feeling sick, Henry staggered toward the stairway. The steps were still there, but so jumbled and piled back upon one another that it was more like climbing the side of a mountain than mounting a stairway. It was quiet in the huge chamber that had been the lobby of the bank. It looked strangely cheerful with the sunlight shining through the girders where the ceiling had fallen. The dappled sunlight glinted across the silent lobby, and everywhere there were huddled lumps of unpleasantness that made Henry sick as he tried not to look at them.

"Mr. Carsville," he called. It was very quiet. Something had to be done, of course. This was terrible, right in the middle of a Monday, too. Mr. Carsville would know what to do. He called again, more loudly, and his voice cracked hoarsely, "Mr. Carrrrsville!" And then he saw an arm and shoulder extending out from under a huge fallen block of marble ceiling. In the buttonhole was the white carnation Mr. Carsville had worn to work that morning, and on the third finger of that hand was a massive signet ring, also belonging to Mr. Carsville. Numbly, Henry realized that the rest of Mr. Carsville was under that block of marble.

Henry felt a pang of real sorrow. Mr. Carsville was gone, and so was the rest of the staff—Mr. Wilkinson and Mr. Emory and Mr. Prithard, and the same with Pete and Ralph and Jenkins and Hunter and Pat the guard and Willie the doorman. There was no one to say what was to be done about the Eastside Bank & Trust except Henry Bemis, and Henry wasn't worried about the bank, there was something he wanted to do.

He climbed carefully over piles of fallen masonry. Once he stepped down into something that crunched and squashed beneath his feet and he set his teeth on edge to keep from retching. The street was not much different from the inside, bright sunlight and so much concrete to crawl over, but the unpleasantness was much, much worse. Everywhere there were strange, motionless lumps that Henry could not look at.

Suddenly, he remembered Agnes. He should be trying to get to Agnes, shouldn't he? He remembered a poster he had seen that said, "In event of emergency do not use the telephone, your loved ones are as safe as you." He wondered about Agnes. He looked at the smashed automobiles, some with their four wheels pointing skyward like the stiffened legs of dead animals. He couldn't get to Agnes now anyway, if she was safe, then, she was safe, otherwise ... of course, Henry knew Agnes wasn't safe. He had a feeling that there wasn't anyone safe for a long, long way, maybe not in the whole state or the whole country, or the whole world. No, that was a thought Henry didn't want to think, he forced it from his mind and turned his thoughts back to Agnes.

She had been a pretty good wife, now that it was all said and done. It wasn't exactly her fault if people didn't have time to read nowadays. It was just that there was the house, and the bank, and the yard. There were the Jones' for bridge and the Graysons' for canasta and charades with the Bryants. And the television, the television Agnes loved to watch, but would never watch alone. He never had time to read even a newspaper. He started thinking about last night, that business about the newspaper.

Henry had settled into his chair, quietly, afraid that a creaking spring might call to Agnes' attention the fact that he was momentarily unoccupied. He had unfolded the newspaper slowly and carefully, the sharp crackle of the paper would have been a clarion call to Agnes. He had glanced at the headlines of the first page. "Collapse Of Conference Imminent." He didn't have time to read the article. He turned to the second page. "Solon Predicts War Only Days Away." He flipped through the pages faster, reading brief snatches here and there, afraid to spend too much time on any one item. On a back page was a brief article entitled, "Prehistoric Artifacts Unearthed In Yucatan". Henry smiled to himself and carefully folded the sheet of paper into fourths. That would be interesting, he would read all of it. Then it came, Agnes' voice. "Henrrreee!" And then she was upon him. She lightly flicked the paper out of his hands and into the fireplace. He saw the flames lick up and curl possessively around the unread article. Agnes continued, "Henry, tonight is the Jones' bridge night. They'll be here in thirty minutes and I'm not dressed yet, and here you are ... reading." She had emphasized the last word as though it were an unclean act. "Hurry and shave, you know how smooth Jasper Jones' chin always looks, and then straighten up this room." She glanced regretfully toward the fireplace. "Oh dear, that paper, the television schedule ... oh well, after the Jones leave there won't be time for anything but the late-late movie and.... Don't just sit there, Henry, hurrreeee!"

Henry was hurrying now, but hurrying too much. He cut his leg on a twisted piece of metal that had once been an automobile fender. He thought about things like lock-jaw and gangrene and his hand trembled as he tied his pocket-handkerchief around the wound. In his mind, he saw the fire again, licking across the face of last night's newspaper. He thought that now he would have time to read all the

newspapers he wanted to, only now there wouldn't be any more. That heap of rubble across the street had been the Gazette Building. It was terrible to think there would never be another up to date newspaper. Agnes would have been very upset, no television schedule. But then, of course, no television. He wanted to laugh but he didn't. That wouldn't have been fitting, not at all.

He could see the building he was looking for now, but the silhouette was strangely changed. The great circular dome was now a ragged semi-circle, half of it gone, and one of the great wings of the building had fallen in upon itself. A sudden panic gripped Henry Bemis. What if they were all ruined, destroyed, every one of them? What if there wasn't a single one left? Tears of helplessness welled in his eyes as he painfully fought his way over and through the twisted fragments of the city.

He thought of the building when it had been whole. He remembered the many nights he had paused outside its wide and welcoming doors. He thought of the warm nights when the doors had been thrown open and he could see the people inside, see them sitting at the plain wooden tables with the stacks of books beside them. He used to think then, what a wonderful thing a public library was, a place where anybody, anybody at all could go in and read.

He had been tempted to enter many times. He had watched the people through the open doors, the man in greasy work clothes who sat near the door, night after night, laboriously studying, a technical journal perhaps, difficult for him, but promising a brighter future. There had been an aged, scholarly gentleman who sat on the other side of the door, leisurely paging, moving his lips a little as he did so, a man having little time left, but rich in time because he could do with it as he chose.

Henry had never gone in. He had started up the steps once, got almost to the door, but then he remembered Agnes, her questions and shouting, and he had turned away.

He was going in now though, almost crawling, his breath coming in stabbing gasps, his hands torn and bleeding. His trouser leg was sticky red where the wound in his leg had soaked through the handkerchief. It was throbbing badly but Henry didn't care. He had reached his destination.

Part of the inscription was still there, over the now doorless entrance. P-U-B—C L-I-B-R—. The rest had been torn away. The place was in shambles. The shelves were overturned, broken, smashed, tilted, their precious contents spilled in disorder upon the floor. A lot of the books, Henry noted gleefully, were still intact, still whole, still readable. He was literally knee deep in them, he wallowed in books. He picked one up. The title was "Collected Works of William Shakespeare." Yes, he must read that, sometime. He laid it aside carefully. He picked up another. Spinoza. He tossed it away, seized another, and another, and still another. Which to read first ... there were so many.

He had been conducting himself a little like a starving man in a delicatessen—grabbing a little of this and a little of that in a frenzy of enjoyment.

But now he steadied away. From the pile about him, he selected one volume, sat comfortably down on an overturned shelf, and opened the book.

Henry Bemis smiled.

There was the rumble of complaining stone. Minute in comparison with the epic complaints following the fall of the bomb. This one occurred under one corner of the shelf upon which Henry sat.

The shelf moved; threw him off balance. The glasses slipped from his nose and fell with a tinkle.

He bent down, clawing blindly and found, finally, their smashed remains. A minor, indirect destruction stemming from the sudden, wholesale smashing of a city. But the only one that greatly interested Henry Bemis.

He stared down at the blurred page before him.

He began to cry.

—THE END—
